SUNDAYS OF THE SAINTS

CHAPMAN

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Sermon Outlines for the Feast Days which may Occur on Sundays

By the Reverend

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To

THE FRIEND OF MANY YEARS

THE REV. C. E. S. RASAY, M.A.

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PREFACE

In the course of the Ecclesiastical Year it may happen, more or less frequently, that certain Feasts of our Lord, of His Blessed Mother, the Apostles and other notable Saints will fall on Sunday, thus displacing the Mass of the Sunday, with its "Proper." This "occurrence" will often be overlooked by the busy Priest until he consults his Ordo, possibly on the very eve of the festival, and sermon material for such days is not likely to be easily accessible at short notice. It is believed that a little book of Sermon Schemata for such "Sunday Feast Days" will be a welcome and useful addition to the library of homiletic material.

No provision is made for the Feast of the Holy Name, or of the Holy Family, since these are regularly observed on the first two Sundays of the civil year. The Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, coming as it does in Advent, does not displace the Sunday, so no

notes for it are given here. As it is unlikely that the March Feast of St. Joseph and the "Solemnity" of the same Saint will both occur on a Sunday in the same year, but one schema is given, which will be found under March 19.

Since the English books of Gospels for pulpit use do not, usually, give the vernacular of the Holy Gospel read in the Mass on such festivals, the citation is given, after the Sermon Text, in each case, so that the proper Gospel of the day (from which, in most instances, the Sermon Text is taken) may be read from the approved version of the Bible.

While in a given year there may not be more than one or two of these "occurrences" the very next year may bring five or six. The author, therefore, humbly hopes that this little book may be of continuing and increasing usefulness to his brethren, whom he asks to pray for him.

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SUNDAYS OF THE SAINTS

THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD

January 1

TEXT. St. Luke 2:21: And after eight days were accomplished, that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel, before He was conceived in the womb.

At the beginning of each New Year the Church wisely reminds us of the important event at the beginning of the earthly life of our Divine Lord which this Feast Day commemorates. Strange, it seems, that we, as Christians and Catholics should have our attention called to a ceremony of the Old Jewish Law which was among those many observances abrogated by the coming of Christ. The rea-

son is easy to understand, it is the same reason as that which led our Saviour to submit to the ancient rite, though He needed it not: the same reason which He Himself declared when undergoing the Jewish rite of Baptism at the hands of St. John, though He needed it not; "For so," said He, "it becometh us to fulfil all justice." (St. Matthew 3: 15.) According to the flesh, Christ was a Jew, and as such He carefully fulfilled every detail of the Jewish Law, admonishing His disciples, "Do not think I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. (St. Matthew 5: 17.) It is the lesson of Obedience which our Divine Lord would teach us, both by precept and example, and which Holy Church would inculcate not only on this Feast Day but at all times.

(1) As creatures we are bound to obey the laws and commandments which God, our Creator, imposes upon us for our good. Christ as God was not so bound, but as Man He took it upon Himself to be obedient to His Heavenly Father. His human will was perfectly united to the Divine Will, as St. Paul tells us "being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedi-

ent unto death, even to the death of the Cross." (Philippians 2:7, 8.) This He did in order that in Himself the will of man, which had rebelled against God, might be perfectly reunited to God. This He did, also, to give us the perfect example of obedience, all the more wonderful because, as Lawgiver, He was not bound to obey. Nay more, He Who is Lord and Creator, God over all, obeys His own creatures. Practically the only record we have of the twenty years of our Lord's life before the beginning of His public ministry is contained in the words of St. Luke, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." (St. Luke 2:51.)

(2) It goes without saying that our Blessed Lord kept perfectly all the Commandments of the Moral Law. His most hateful enemy never dared accuse Him of immorality in any form, even when He challenged the world in the words "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" The very thought that Christ could sin is a blasphemy; His sinless, perfect character is the amazement of the world, even of those who believe not on Him. But it was not alone the Moral Law which He observed blameless; the minute prescriptions of the ecclesiastical

law of the Jewish religion were no less sacred in His eyes, though they were but types and shadows of the New Law which He was to establish in His True Church. The principles which underlay the old Jewish ceremonial law were sound and right. Even the details of their observance had been decreed by God and promulgated by Moses. To these our Blessed Lord gave unswerving obedience, though He reprobated those "commandments of men" which the Scribes and Pharisees had added, without authority, to what was required by the Church. Most of the details of this old ritual law were superseded by the Church which Christ founded, by His authority and in accordance with His new commandment of love. But underlying principles remained, because they were true.

(3) For example: we are not required to abstain from pork, as were the Jews. But the principle of abstinence remains, and we *are* required to abstain from all flesh food on one day each week. We are not required to pay a tenth part of our gross income to the Church, as were the Jews; but we *are* bound to contribute, according to our means, to the support of our lawful pastors and of the fabric of the

church. We are not bound to wash our hands before we pray; but we are required to come before God cleansed from the defilement of sin, and upon entering a church we are recommended to take holy water as a symbol of that spiritual cleansing. Both in the matter of the Moral Law and of the Church Law, our Lord is our pattern and our example. See Him, this holy day, as He sheds, for the first time, His Precious Blood in the needless observance of a rite which He is to replace by the Catholic Sacrament of Baptism. Yet He thought this ancient ceremony, already passing away, of sufficient importance to bleed for it. And we—how careless we are not merely of the ceremonial observances of our Holy Religion but even in our keeping of the unchangeable Moral Law, serious breach of which is Mortal Sin.

PERORATION. Sin is disobedience to the known Will of God, the rebellion of the creature against the commandments of his Creator. The history of the human race is one long story of such disobedience, and as we look back over our own lives we see that the same is true of ourselves. Is there a Commandment that we have not broken, at least in thought? Has a day

of our lives passed without more or less rebellion against the Will of God? Recall the troubles and trials of the past year; were they not, every one of them, directly traceable to sin, our own or another's? Sin always brings unhappiness, though it often falsely promises just the opposite. Today we are all wishing each other "A Happy New Year," but we must remember that we can only be happy when we are good. Obedience is the golden key to the happiness of earth and of heaven, obedience motivated not by fear of the terrible punishments which God metes out to those who dare defy Him and set up their puny human wills against His Divine Will as expressly declared in His Commandments, but obedience compelled by love, the love of the creature for the Creator, the love of the redeemed for the Saviour, the love which, as the Apostle tells us, is the fulfilling of the Law. (Romans 13: 10.)

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

January 6

TEXT. St. Matthew 2:11: And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down they adored Him.

"Little Christmas" (as this feast day is sometimes called) is really a very great festival, being honored by Holy Church in special prayers and preface during Holy Mass, and kept, like Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, through an Octave or eight days' observance. Formerly it was an Holy Day of Obligation, though in our time it is but a feast of devotion. Its commemoration of the visit of the Three Wise Men to the Infant Savior marks the termination of the Christmas season, but it brings to our attention, also, the great and happy fact that the Gentile world was meant to share in that great salvation which the Christ Child came on earth to bring, not to one

nation only, but to all mankind everywhere. The Magi were not Jews. They came from the East, following the Star, and they represented the whole world of men outside the Old Covenant, who should come flocking into the ark of the New Covenant. Thus, at the very beginning of His earthly life, our Divine Redeemer showed that His Church was to be Catholic, for all men everywhere, of every nation, and of every time, even to the end of the world.

(1) The old Jewish Church was, before the coming of Christ, the one true Church of God upon earth. No one who has any faith at all in the eternal truths enshrined in Holy Scripture, has any doubt of this. Out of all the families of the ancient world, God had chosen one, the family of Abraham, to be peculiarly His People. Through many generations that tribe grew into the Jewish Nation, to which God gave the Revelation of His Eternal Truths, to whom He gave the Law from Mt. Sinai, by whom, under His inspiration, the Scriptures of the Old Testament were written. Other nations and peoples had but a partial understanding of these truths. They had, to be sure, that Natural Religion which the unaided intellect and reason of mankind is able to under-

stand, but which is so prone to become corrupt and idolatrous. Only the Jews had the True Faith, only in their Temple at Jerusalem was God rightly worshipped.

(2) Thus God planned to prepare the world for the coming of His Son to be Saviour. The Prophets had foretold even the details of that coming, and of His life and death. That He should be born of a Virgin, in the city of Bethlehem; that He should spend most of His earthly life in Nazareth; that He should teach the people and work miracles; that He should be sold by a false friend for a certain sum; that He should die upon the Cross, and rise again the third day; all these and many other events of the life of Christ were foretold in the Old Testament. Moreover, the rites and ceremonies of the Temple were all symbolical of the Sacrifice which Christ should offer upon the Cross, and which should be perpetuated upon the altars of the Catholic Church. As we sing in the Tantum Ergo, they were types and shadows that were only ended in the New Rite of the True Church of Christ, which should begin where the Old Jewish Church left off.

(3) But in this old dispensation, the world outside of the Jewish Nation had little or no

part. They were Gentiles, carried away by false and idolatrous cults. (1 Corinthians 12:2.) Yet, as St. Paul tells us, God never left Himself without witnesses, (Acts 14:16) even among the heathen, and here and there, great and good men, following faithfully such light as they had, discerned dimly the great Truths which God wished to declare to the world. Of such were the Three Magi, to whom, even in their paganism, was given a glimmering of the Truth, like the Star which led them to the cradle of Christ who is the true Light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. (St. John 1:9.) Thus would God reveal Himself to every man who honestly seeks Him. Even the heathen, who have had no opportunity to learn the Truth, will be saved to a certain natural blessedness forever if they consistently practice that Natural Religion which Reason teaches to mankind even outside of Revelation.

PERORATION. But God wills that all should know Him, fully and perfectly, and share in the blessings and privileges of His True Religion. The Catholic Church, founded by Jesus Christ to accomplish the salvation of the world,

was not, and is not limited to any one nation, but is universal, for all men and for all time. That is why the Catholic Church has always maintained missionary activities, going into all the world to proclaim the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. From the very beginning it has been so. Little by little the ancient world, which had been entirely pagan, was converted to the Catholic Faith by apostolic and zealous missionaries, who, more often than not, sealed their great work with their own life-blood. Till at last the entire western world was Catholic, and even large portions of the Orient, out of which the Three Wise Men had come. But those Eastern Lands are still, today, for the most part pagan, and it is left to us, who know the Truth, who value the gift of Faith which is ours above every earthly possession, to bring the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ to those distant lands which still wait in the ancient superstition of the gentiles for the Star to shine which shall lead them to the cradle of Christ. How better can we show our gratitude to God for giving us the Faith than by making it possible for missionaries to spread that Faith among the heathen?

Let this Feast of the Epiphany be to us the means of stirring up our interest in and zeal for the Missions of the Catholic Church in heathen lands.

THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

February 2

TEXT. *St. Luke 2: 32: A light to the revelation of the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.* (*St. Luke 2: 22–32.*)

Centuries before the Birth of Christ, while the Chosen People were still wandering in the desert on their way from the bondage of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, God gave the revelation of how He willed to be worshipped, and the Tabernacle was set up at the foot of Mt. Sinai, with the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, before which burned the Seven Branched Candlestick, and over which hovered the Shekinah, the Pillar of Fire by night and of Cloud by day, which signified the presence of God in the midst of His people. Arrived at the Land of Promise, after the vicissitudes of settlement, the first care of the newly made kings of Israel was to

build a permanent Temple in which to carry on the worship which had become the center of their life. Destroyed by enemies, this Temple was again and again rebuilt, until it finally perished after the rejection, by the Jews, of Christ. Of the rebuilt Temple, God said, by the mouth of His Prophet Aggeus, "I will fill this house with glory—Great shall be the glory of this last house more than of the first." (Aggeus 2: 8 and 10.) Of this Temple also, Malachias, the last of the prophetical writers of the Old Testament, foretold: "Presently the Lord, whom you seek, whom you desire, shall come to His temple." (Malachias 3: 1.) This day is the ancient prophesy fulfilled, as Mary bears into the court of the Temple the Infant Christ.

(1) What joy to have been there on that memorable occasion, to have stood by while the aged Simeon took the Babe in his arms and blessed God for the fulfillment of the promise. Ready, indeed, was he to depart in the peace of God, having seen that sight. Anna the Prophetess comes running in to add her glad cries to the general rejoicing. And Mary, His Mother, kept all these words in Her heart (St.

Luke 2: 51) to tell them, years afterwards, to the Evangelist who has handed them down to us in the pages of the New Testament. But we were not there, though we may picture the scene in reverent imagination, meditating upon it while we say the Rosary, drawing from it the precious lessons it has to teach us.

(2) The Church has also her ways of impressing these lessons upon us. The ceremonies of Candlemas are most significant; the blessing of the candles, which typify Christ as the Light of the World; the procession from the Altar, symbolizing the sending forth of the Light of the Gospel to the Gentile world; the singing of the Canticle, Nunc Dimittis, which prophesies that the Christ shall enlighten that world, which had hitherto sat in darkness and the shadow of death; the carrying of the blessed candles by the Faithful to their homes, to be used on occasions of special spiritual need; all these impress upon our minds the great fact that the coming of Christ into this world has totally and entirely changed human life as light chases away darkness and brings security and joy into what would otherwise be unmitigated gloom. If we chose but one of

the lessons of the day upon which to dwell awhile, it is not that we underestimate the others.

(3) So we select, as our chief consideration today, the thought of the Light of Christ going out to the whole world. In Old Testament times the True Religion was confined to one Chosen Nation, the Jews. To the worship of the ancient Temple only Jews were admitted. There was, to be sure, a "Court of the Gentiles" to which outsiders were admitted, but not as participants in the worship. They were, at best, but spectators, tolerated but not encouraged. Not for them the revelation of the One True God, though even then there were intimations that the day of the Gentiles would dawn with the coming of the Christ. The first struggles of the Catholic Church were due to her insistance that Salvation was not to be confined to the Jews but was open to all the world, that Christ was not the Savior of a small national group, but of all mankind. So dazzling was the light of this stupendous message that it could not but spread. The Jews rejected both Christ and His Church, till St. Paul exclaimed "because you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the

Gentiles." (Acts 13: 46) How eagerly the world outside of Israel accepted the Gospel the history of the Catholic Church proves abundantly. How the children of the world have flocked to the Light of Christ: how that True Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world (St. John 1: 9) has spread far and wide! Ah, well we know it, for are not *we* of the number of the Gentiles?

PERORATION. So this Feast Day has a peculiar and joyful significance to us, who out of every nation under heaven have been gathered into the universal embrace of the Catholic Church. Shall we not rejoice and be glad because "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus." (2 Corinthians 4: 6.) As we carry our blessed candles with us to our homes, shall we not thank God that we are not left in the darkness of "the ancient superstition of the Gentiles" but that the light of Truth has penetrated even into the most inner recesses of our lives, to transfigure and transform them, to chase away the shadows of sin and sorrow, to

be our hope when the hopes of earth are gone, to light us out upon that last grim journey not into the darkness of death but into the endless light of eternity.

ST. MATTHIAS THE APOSTLE

February 24. (In Leap Year, the 25th.)

TEXT. Acts 1: 26: "The lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles." (*St. Matthew 11: 25–30.*)

The story of the election of St. Matthias as a member of the College of Apostles is given in the Lesson (in place of the Epistle) for his Feast, in the Book of the Acts, chapter one, verses fifteen to twenty six. He was the first Bishop to be elected by the Church, after the Ascension of our Blessed Lord, and before the coming of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost. We do not read that there was any ordination by the other Apostles, only the election, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, after diligent prayer. The Ordination itself was accomplished by the Descent of the Holy Ghost, which completed the ordination even of the other Apostles whom Christ Himself had chosen and partially ordained.

Of the after life of this Saint we know very little. The Breviary gives no legend of him, and Tradition is somewhat confused, there being two lines of legend; one was that he preached the Gospel in Judaea, and afterwards evangelized Ethiopia, where he met the martyr's death by crucifixion; the other that he was stoned to death by the Jews in Jerusalem early in the persecution of the Church. But these historical data are not important, for the great lesson this Saint has to teach us on his Feast Day is not regarding his personal sanctity, but rather of the office which he held. Thus early in the history of the Catholic Church we learn of her power to elect Bishops, a prerogative undoubtedly taught by Christ Himself during the Great Forty Days between Easter and His Ascension when He spoke to the Apostles "of the Kingdom of God." (Acts 1:3.) Indeed this power is implied in Christ's command to them to go teach all nations. (St. Matthew 28:19.) For this was a task they could not possibly accomplish in their lifetime, and therefore the power to perpetuate their Order must have been inherent in it, that Christ's command might be obeyed, and His promise fulfilled to be with

them all the days, even to the consummation of the world. (St. Matthew 28:20.) We may well, on this Feast Day, consider the office, the powers and the work of the Episcopate.

(1) The original Twelve Apostles were chosen by Christ Himself. But to take the place of Judas, the Eleven elected St. Matthias, and ever since then the Bishops of the Church have chosen those, from among the Faithful and, since early times, from among the Priests, to carry on their office. For the Episcopacy, both as to the Order of Bishops, and their office as Pastors and Rulers of the Church, is (as the theologians say) of the esse of the Church, i. e. essential to the continuance and functioning of the Catholic Church founded by Christ and directed through all time by the Holy Ghost. "Ubi Episcopus, ibi Ecclesia" where the Bishop is, there is the Church, is a very ancient maxim, and expresses perfectly the doctrine of the Catholic Faith on this important point. We learned in the Catechism that Apostolicity is a Mark or Note of the True Church. Without the Succession of Bishops the Church could not continue, and, as a matter of historical fact, most of those sects which have separated from the Catholic

Church have lost the Order of Bishops (and consequently the Priesthood) and most of them have repudiated the very idea of Episcopacy. Those who claim still to have Bishops can (in the case of the Anglicans) be shown by history to have lost the real succession, while others (as the Schismatic Greeks) though retaining the Order have lost the Jurisdiction, or right to exercise it, by separation from the Pope, who is the chief Bishop and Pastor of the Church by divine institution.

(2) The Episcopate exercises the full powers of the Sacred Priesthood. A Bishop administers all the Sacraments, including Confirmation and Ordination. Although, under certain extraordinary conditions, he may delegate the power of Confirmation (always administered, however, with Oil consecrated by a Bishop) only he may ordain to the Major Orders. Thus upon the Bishops depends the continuance of the Ministry of the Catholic Church, and so the very existence of the Church itself requires the Episcopacy. Without the Bishops we would have no Priests; without the Priesthood we would have no Sacraments (save Baptism and Matrimony).

The Bishops of the Catholic Church, as Successors of the Apostles, are the official teachers of the Faithful. To them alone is the function of preaching proper by right, but they delegate this duty to the Priests as a matter of practical necessity. So far we have considered the Order of Bishop. But he has also what is called "ordinary jurisdiction." In other words he is the chief Pastor of the Flock of Christ in the Diocese committed to his charge by our Holy Father the Pope, who is, of course, the Chief Pastor of the whole Church, from whom all jurisdiction derives. It is both the prerogative and the duty of the Bishop to rule and govern that portion of the Church over which he is set. Indeed the very name Bishop, means one who rules over a flock, Episcopos, the over-seer. It is for the Bishop, if necessary, to enforce the discipline of the Church. His Pastoral Staff (the Shepherd's Crook) must sometimes be used to drive the sheep, if they refuse to be led! Besides all this the Bishop has certain liturgical and ceremonial functions, gives certain blessings, consecrates altars, churches, sacred vessels and the like, appoints the Pastors of the various parishes, acts as judge in certain cases,

including matrimonial cases, and is the trustee of all the property belonging to the Church in his diocese.

(3) From all this you can easily see that the work of a Catholic Bishop is arduous and difficult, his responsibilities great. Yet it has been said by a certain Saint that one soul would be diocese enough for a Bishop. Not one soul but many are under his care, and surely he feels the burden, as did St. Paul when he counted his greatest burden "the solicitude for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11: 28.) The people, who see their Bishop only on occasions of festivity, in solemn functions like Confirmation or the Dedication of a Church, can hardly be expected to realize how hard a life is that of a Catholic Bishop, how many cares, responsibilities and sorrows he carries in his heart, how his head must often ache under the burden of his mitre.

PERORATION. So on this Feast of one of the first Bishops of the Church, we learn not only to honor and obey our Bishops, as we are in duty bound as Catholics to do, but also to pray for them, as indeed we are bound by Charity to do. "Remember your prelates who have spoken the word of God to you; whose faith

follow, considering the end of their conversation." (Hebrews 13: 7.) And Saint Paul constantly begs the Catholics of his time "Brethren, pray for us." (1 Thessalonians 5: 25; 2 Thess. 3: 1; Heb. 15: 18.) When we consider the great powers of the Episcopacy we cannot honor our Bishops enough. As good Catholics we are bound to obey them in the Lord. But most of all we are bound to pray for them. In every Holy Mass the Priest prays for his Bishop by name, as well as for the Pope who is the Chief Bishop of Christendom. When we consider how many graces we have received, directly or indirectly, from the hands of our Bishop, shall we not repay a little of the debt we owe him by fervently praying for him every day of our lives?

March 19

TEXT. St. Matthew 1: 19: Joseph her husband, being a just man. (*St. Matthew 1: 18–21.*)

Of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mother of God and Foster Father of Our Blessed Lord, Almighty God has revealed that he was "a just man." Beyond what we learn from Holy Scripture of him (and it is surprisingly little) the facts of his life are unknown to us. There are even two traditions concerning his age, one representing him as young, the other as old. From the circumstance of his not being mentioned in the history of the Passion, it is believed that he died before Christ began His public ministry. Devotion to him as a Saint, fervent in the Orient from the earliest ages of Christianity, has later grown in the West to such an extent that he is now formally constituted the Patron of the Universal

Church, and the nations of Christendom vie with one another in doing him honor. The churches and altars dedicated to him are literally numberless. (Adapted from "The Book of Saints" by the Benedictines of Ramsgate.) But were nothing else known of him, even by legend, the witness of Holy Scripture to his justice would be sufficient to warrant our devotion to him. Shall we not spend a few moments of his Feast Day in studying that justice, that we may the better imitate him in this, his chief, though by no means only, virtue.

(1) Whether St. Joseph was a young man, who at the call of God to be the Protector of the Holy Family gave up the joys which any young man may rightfully look forward to in a holy married life; or an old man whose great work in life was left to the end; he found himself in a sufficiently embarrassing predicament when it was disclosed to him that his espoused wife was to become a mother. Even in his perplexity (for he knew certainly that Mary was a virgin) his justice made him unwilling "publicly to expose her" (St. Matthew 1: 19) and he considered how he might "put her away privately." (Ibid.) Even in his distress he was just, he would not form a judgment unless

and until he knew all the facts. On the face of things he was a deeply injured man, but he did not complain, he did not take any hasty action, he was just. He knew that "to know all is to forgive all," and he thought of Mary rather than of himself. God rewarded both his justice and his patience by revealing to him the true state of affairs. (Ibid. 20 to the end of the chapter.)

(2) Thus St. Joseph knew from the very beginning of the Incarnation that Mary was the Mother of God, that Her Child was indeed True God and True Man. That knowledge aided his natural justice to live through the years in the exalted task of Protector of the Holy Family. He recognized at once that God had given him the very highest vocation possible, and the sacrifices he had to make in fulfilment of that vocation became as nothing to him. The Flight into Egypt was the least of the hardships he endured for love of the Christ and His Virgin Mother. But all this was more than recompensed to him through the long years at Nazareth when to him was vouchsafed the surpassing blessing of daily companionship with Jesus and Mary. The Finding of Christ in the Temple was as great a joy to him as the

loss of Him had been sorrow. And at the end, to die in the arms of the Saviour! Truly a great reward for the service which he had given out of love, without hope of recompense, and from the sense that he owed it all to God, the sense of justice, which made him little in his own eyes.

(3) This, then, is the special lesson we have to learn from St. Joseph on his Feast Day—that justice is the truest humility. To have a really just estimate of ourselves, and of others, cannot make us anything but humble. Pride is the exaggerated sense of our own importance, our own worth, our own powers and abilities. Pride is the setting up of our own opinion against all others, even against the will and commandment of God Himself. For what is sin but pride, pride which refuses to serve God, thinks it knows better than God what is good and right, dares to defy God and to follow its own way in spite of commandments, warnings, pleas by which God would save us from our own blindness and folly. But if we obtain, through the prayers of St. Joseph, but a modicum of the justice that was his, we shall know ourselves as we really are, and there will be no place left for pride.

PERORATION. Our just judgment of self should extend also to others. Justice forbids hasty judgments, demands that before we make up our minds we must have all the data before us. As we can, practically, never be sure of knowing everything about others, we should, in justice, refrain from judging them. Besides, who are we to judge others? "Judge not, that you may not be judged" says our Blessed Lord. (St. Matthew 7: 1.) We have enough to do to judge ourselves justly, to form a true estimate both of our virtues and of our faults. Now this virtue is not merely a natural justice, for its motive is supernatural. It is not enough for us to be just from motives of prudence, because injustice will get us into trouble. The true motive for justice is love, love for God and for our fellow men. That was the secret of St. Joseph's justice, that it was which made him strong to be just in his judgment even when he was aggrieved. Who can hope to be just in that way without the help of God? So, today, we pray to this great Saint to obtain for us from God such a measure of this virtue that we may share with him in the rewards which God promises those who "walk in the path of the just." (Proverbs 4: 18.)

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

March 25

TEXT. *St. Luke 1:38: And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.* (*St. Luke 1:26–38.*)

What if Mary had *not* consented! If, instead of answering the message of Gabriel in the words of our text, She had demurred, or refused to undertake the great work which God offered to Her. Her will was free; She might have declined for a number of reasons; because the honor was too great for Her humility, or the burden too much for Her strength, or simply because She did not fully understand what was expected of Her. We are so accustomed to taking the Bible story of the Incarnation for granted, and our devotion to Mary is so great, that very likely it has never occurred to us to question what might have been the result of

such a refusal on Her part. Indeed it would have been contrary to the whole character of the Blessed Virgin to have hesitated even for one instant, and we find it difficult even to imagine such a thing as that She would refuse to do what was so evidently the Will of God for Her. We may, perhaps, find additional cause to honor Her today if we consider this unusual aspect of the matter.

(1) For Mary was not obliged to accept God's appointment. She was perfectly free to refuse to become the human instrument of the Incarnation. And it was in order that She might exercise Her free will that God, by the lips of Gabriel, made Her the offer which we celebrate today. He might have accomplished His purpose without consulting Her. After all, She was but His creature, and by a fiat of His Will He could have brought the Incarnation to pass without consulting Her. But because man fell by the wrong exercise of Free Will, so man must be redeemed by the right exercise of that crowning and supreme gift of human nature. God who created us without our choice, will not save us unless we choose to be saved. So He would not come into this world by any other means than that which we

see today; the acceptance of His Will by one of His creatures.

(2) There were, as has been suggested above, several reasons why Mary might have declined to serve as the handmaid of the Lord. She might have refused out of that very humility which was one of Her chief characteristics. She might have questioned, more fully than She did, "how shall this be done?" (St. Luke 1:34.) The record of Scripture plainly shows that She did not understand the mystery in which She was called to bear a part. Her spotless innocence and purity did not mean that She was ignorant of the holy facts of life, and She must have known the difficulties which would inevitably beset Her if She consented to become the Mother of God, when only a few might know that Her child was, indeed, God. But it needed only the assurance of the Angel that this matter was of God. Her question was never for one moment one of doubt, or of unwillingness, but purely one of prudence. Her consent was conditioned upon one thing only, that this that was asked of Her must surely be God's Will. Convinced of that Her answer was immediate.

(3) To be sure, Her whole existence had

been a preparation for this moment. Immaculately conceived, as the first necessary step in the divine process of the Incarnation, Her life had been dedicated to God, Her whole thought had been of Him, so that not even the stain of venial sin had ever shadowed Her soul. Yet, in spite of all this, She was human. She might have let pass this greatest opportunity ever offered to any human soul, and that for reasons which, to many, would seem good and sufficient. But She consented. She spoke the word which brought God from His throne of glory into this world, as He wished to come, to be one with us His creatures. "And the Word was made Flesh." (St. John 1: 14.) For this God Himself waited the word of His creature, without which He would do nothing, upon which He was willing to let the salvation of the world depend.

PERORATION. The honor and love we bear to Mary is immeasurably augmented by such considerations as these, for they show us how much we owe to Her. The Incarnation had its human side and that was Mary. We cannot know how or when God would have accomplished His purpose had she reacted in some different way than She did to the message of

the Angel. It is enough for us to know that She did consent, and that the result of that obedience of Hers to the Divine Will was to bring the Saviour into this world to our great and endless comfort.

There is a very practical lesson in this for us to take to heart today. For to us (though not at the lips of an angel) God makes known His Will, and upon our following of it our own salvation depends. We may not always know why He asks certain things of us, we may not know how He will accomplish His purpose for us. But we do know that He will not save us without the coöperation and consent of our wills. He will force no man to be His servant, any more than He would force Mary to be His Handmaid. But if we, following Her example, instantly consent to whatever God may will for us, consistently follow what He asks and commands, coöperate in every way in our power with what we know to be His Will, we need not doubt as to the consequences to our souls, for their salvation will be assured by that obedience. There are difficulties in our way, as there were in Hers. But Her prayers will obtain for us the grace to surmount them. Ask Her, then, on this great

Feast Day, to obtain for you the grace always to obey the Will of God. As you repeat the message of the angel, add to it the prayer of the Church, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death" that we may ever know and do the Divine Will, and so come at the last to see thy dear and virgin face in Heaven.

ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST

April 25

TEXT. *St. Luke 10: 3: "Go: Behold I send you as lambs among wolves."* (*St. Luke 10: 1–9.*)

Two of the writers of the Gospels, St. Mark, whose feast we keep today, and St. Luke, were not Apostles, but it is the tradition of the Church, as witnessed by the Gospel of the Mass read today, that St. Mark was one of the Seventy Disciples sent out by our Lord, and he is to be reckoned as a Deacon, if not eventually a Priest. Tradition also tells us that he was afterwards the special companion of St. Peter, and that the Gospel which bears his name was, in whole or in part, dictated to him by the Prince of the Apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In the recent non-Catholic controversies on scriptural matters, the Gospel according to St. Mark played an important part and was accepted as authen-

tic when the others were questioned. Of course, in the Catholic Church, there has never been any doubt as to the authorship or authority of any of the Gospels, and even in the case of non-Catholic commentators it has become recognized that the story of the life of our Lord as set forth by St. Mark is no less supernatural than that told by the others. Indeed, as being a transcription of St. Peter's testimony to the historical facts of the Incarnate Life, it shows the same elements of miracle as the others, and so is very hard to reconcile with the modern non-Catholic effort to strip from the story of our Lord's Life on earth the very features which Faith treasures most highly.

(1) It is not strange that people nowadays should seek to undermine the very foundations of Faith, for the Catholic Religion has from the very beginning been subject to controversy and there never have been lacking those who, while they wished to profess and call themselves "Christians" yet could not bring themselves to accept the teachings of the Faith whole and entire. Our Lord certainly foresaw this, as we can see from the text which stands at the beginning of this sermon, and numerous other passages wherein He clearly prophesied

that the Truths He declared, and which He commanded His Church to teach, would not be acceptable to the world. He warned His Apostles that they would be persecuted, that their message of salvation would be rejected by many, that they would be called upon to suffer, even unto the death of martyrdom, for their part in its propagation. They were indeed sent forth as lambs amongst wolves, but the command was nevertheless upon them, "Go, teach all nations" at whatever cost. It is a matter of history that they all met with violent deaths for the Faith, except St. John, and he suffered exile, and would also have been a martyr but for the miracle before the Latin Gate.

(2) Not only must the leaders of the Church suffer for their testimony to the Truth, but even the rank and file have ever been called upon to share in the age-long martyrdom of their Holy Mother the Catholic Church. You have heard the story of the first ages of the Faith, the Catacombs, the bloody persecutions, the countless martyrdoms. Truly was it said, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." And down through the centuries, the Church has always prospered in proportion to the persecutions she has endured. It is no less

true today, and you and I, in our lesser measure, are sure to meet, sooner or later, with opposition on account of our Religion. Our fathers, in whatever land they lived, saw it and felt it, and even in this enlightened twentieth century, in this land of freedom, you and I have seen with our own eyes, the open hostility of so-called "Christians" towards the Church, and towards the Catholic people which shows that our Lord's prophecy still holds good.

(3) The opposition of the world is really a challenge to the Church, a challenge to us as Catholics. We are to be martyrs, in spirit if not in actual fact. Permit me to remind you that the word "martyr" means "a witness," one who bears testimony to the Truth, at whatever cost to himself. We are not called upon to die for the Faith, but we are most emphatically called upon to witness to the Faith by living blameless, upright, practical Catholic lives. You, too, are sent forth as lambs amidst wolves, and while the actual preaching of the Faith is the special work of the Bishops and Priests, as successors of the Apostles, the laity have the opportunity to preach a far more powerful, and more far-reaching, sermon in their daily lives.

PERORATION. This feast of St. Mark should

teach us how important in the eyes of God and of the Church are those who hold offices of lesser dignity. St. Mark was but an humble Disciple, yet He was an evangelist, who not only wrote, but preached and lived the Gospel of Christ. However humble our place may be, we can, and must, live our Faith, and so bear our witness to an unbelieving world of the Truth which we believe. Never before was this so necessary, so important. Our lives must give the lie to the calumnies brought against our Holy Mother the Catholic Church. Part of our task is to spread the Faith, not by formal teaching, but by being ever ready to answer questions, by being constant and unashamed in our practice of even the most minute duties of Catholic life, and, of course, by never being ashamed of being Catholics. If we are good Catholics we need not, shall not, be ashamed, but glad and proud, even if it costs us something. May St. Mark obtain for us the grace to do all this.

May 1

TEXT. *St. John 14: 6: Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life.* (*St. John 14: 1–13.*)

Of St. Philip the Apostle, little is known beyond the mentions of him in the Gospels. After the Ascension of Christ he is believed to have preached Christianity in Asia Minor and to have laid down his life for Christ at Hierapolis in Phrygia about the year 80 A. D. His relics are venerated in Rome.

St. James the Less, the brother (that is the cousin) of our Lord, one of the Twelve and the writer of a Canonical Epistle, was known as James the Just and from his youth led a life of extreme austerity. After the Ascension he was appointed Bishop of Jerusalem, and his repute of sanctity became so great that people thought themselves happy if they could but touch the hem of his garment. When ninety

six years of age he suffered martrydom at the hands of the Jews, who cast him down from a pinnacle of the Temple and afterwards finished their work with clubs. He died praying that his enemies might be forgiven. (A. D. 61.) His relics are enshrined in Rome with those of his fellow-Apostle St. Philip, which is the reason why their Feast Day is celebrated as one.

The dialogue between our Blessed Lord and St. Philip at the Last Supper contains some of the strongest claims of Christ to be indeed, in a special and unique sense, the Son of God. That this fundamental dogma of the Faith (i. e. that Jesus Christ is True God and True Man) was not completely realized by the Apostles before the Resurrection of Christ, is evidenced by the words of St. Philip. That Jesus claimed to be God, in the same sense that the Father is God, is equally evidenced by His replies, and declared in the words which serve us as a text. Of course, once the Resurrection was an accomplished fact, the Apostles, and after them all Christendom, hailed Jesus as Lord and God. "And seeing Him they adored." (St. Matthew 28: 17) Can we venerate these two Apostles better than by considering today this first great Truth of Catholicism,

which they preached and for which they laid down their lives?

(1) "I am the Way—No man cometh to the Father, but by Me." (St. John 14: 6.) These words of our Blessed Lord constitute part of His claim to be God, for in them He declares that all who worship Him are in the right road to salvation. Indeed, in the early years of the Church, Christianity was called "the Way." (2 St. Peter 2: 2, Acts 19: 9, et al.) As the perfect revelation of God to man could be accomplished in no other way than by God Himself coming among men, the Incarnation is seen, both as the way God comes to man, and also as the way by which man may approach to God, to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him. It is through Christ, as St. Paul reminds us, that we have access to God by "a new and living way which He hath dedicated for us through the veil, that is to say, His Flesh." (Hebrews 10: 20.) No merely human mediator could accomplish this intimate union of man with God, which is what God has always desired, and what mankind has longed for from the beginning. Has not the desire of all nations been to know God? Has not the human race been groping towards that

knowledge always? And can we doubt that God, who implanted that desire and that longing in the hearts and minds of His creatures, has destined it for fulfilment? But till Christ came it could not be satisfied, for into the awful profundities of the Eternal Godhead the human intellect dared not probe, until in love and condescension God Himself came, in human form, to lead us to Himself.

(2) This, then, is the great Truth which Catholicism declares, in the words of its Founder and of His immediate followers, the Apostles, that Christ is God. Upon this Dogma of Faith the whole structure of Christianity rests; without it all would crumble into nothingness. "He that seeth Me seeth the Father also," said our Divine Lord to St. Philip. (St. John 14: 9.) "I and the Father are One." (St. John 10: 30.) It was for this statement, which they considered blasphemy, and which would have been had not Jesus actually been God as He claimed to be, that the Jews crucified Christ. In the face of it there can be no doubt in the mind of anyone that Jesus claimed to be God, there can be no doubt in the mind of any Christian that He is God, as He claimed to be. Yet today many who "profess and call

themselves Christians" do not so believe. "The Divinity of Christ" is regarded as a hazy theological uncertainty, watered down till it amounts to nothing more than an assertion that He is "the most godlike of men." Oddly enough it is they who deny this basic truth of Christianity who claim to be most ardently engaged in what they call "the search for Truth." Yet all truth depends on this one greatest truth of all. Accept it, and everything else becomes plain. Deny it, and to whom shall you go for certainty or consolation?

(3) For, as we are often reminded in these modern times, "Christianity is a life." It is not enough to believe, to hold the true Faith, to assent intellectually to the truths of revelation. You must live in accordance with those truths, practice that religion, have part in the life of Christ Himself, else you shall not have life in you. (St. John 6: 54.) In a world which is busily trying to demonstrate scientifically that life, as we know it, has evolved from purely natural and mechanical sources, the Church declares that the life of the spirit, so much more important than physical life, derives from God, is sustained by Him, and ultimately returns to Him. The transcendent and immeas-

urably important life of the soul is the chief concern of the Church, her function being the introduction of grace into the soul, its maintenance there, its increase, its preservation not merely for the resolution of the difficulties of this life, but unto Life Eternal. As Christ is "the life" which was and is "the life of men" (St. John 1:4) so those alone whose life is united to His can truly be said to live. "I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me," (Galatians 2:20) should be the epitome of every Christian's life, as it was of St. Paul.

PERORATION. Our most holy religion stands or falls with the Dogma of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. If He is God, Catholicism is the only true, coherent, practical religion in the world today, judged either as to Faith or Morals. If He is not God, the whole structure falls to the ground, Church, Sacraments, ethical system, all must perish with Him. So the great question today, is exactly what it was two thousand years ago, "What think ye of Christ?" (St. Matthew 22:42.) The only answer for Catholics is the confession of St. Peter, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;" the assertion of the Creed said in Holy Mass, "God of God, Light of Light, True God of True

God," the Way, without which there is no going, the Truth without which there is no knowing, the Life, without which there is no living, but of Whom it has been said that whosoever believeth in Him hath life eternal. (St. John 11: 26.)

May 3

TEXT. *Galatians 6: 14: God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (*St. John 3: 1–15.*)

It was in the year 326 that the Empress, St. Helena, mother of Constantine, led by a vision, made pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the hope of recovering the true Cross upon which our Lord had died. In due time the place was found, but there were three crosses there, and the superscription, which might have identified that of the Saviour, was so displaced that the Saint and those with her, were at a loss as to which of the three was the relic. Finally it was suggested that the three crosses should be brought to the bed-side of a dying woman, who was touched by each in turn. The application of the third resulted in her miraculous and instantaneous healing, and so the true Cross was

recognized. Enshrined in the place of honor, it was divided into fragments. The largest relics of it extant today are in the Church of the Holy Cross in Rome and consist of bits about three inches long by an inch wide. Nearly every Bishop has a minute relic of the true Cross, often hardly more than a hair-like splinter. These have been passed down, from Bishop to Bishop, through the ages.

(1) The anti-Catholic calumny that there are "enough relics of the Cross to build a ship" is seen to be ridiculous in view of the facts. Most relics, especially those of the Cross, are but tiny fragments, so that it may be doubted if all the authentic relics of the Cross in existance today would aggregate one tenth the size of the entire Cross. A very careful system of authentication has been carried out for centuries, relics being divided with great reverence, and each separate piece vouched for under the signature and seal of some Bishop. It should not be necessary to refute the old assertion that Catholics worship relics. They pay them reverent veneration, and who, indeed, would not be awed by the thought that before their eyes, perhaps within their hands, there was exposed a portion of that Holy Cross upon

which Christ shed His Blood for the redemption of the world. In the national Museum at Washington the sword, hat, clothing of "the Father of his Country" are preserved, historical relics which have their counterparts in similar relics of the heroes of every civilized nation. Who does not treasure some souvenir of a mother who has gone, or some departed friend? Is the respect we show to such human relics wrong? The few mementos we still have of the Passion of our Redeemer, the relics of the true Cross, the Nails, the portion of the Superscription etc., are objects of veneration, but not of worship such as is given only to God.

(2) That cures have been, and are, wrought by relics is an indisputable fact. Nor need we be surprised at this, for such curative powers are plainly ascribed by the Bible to the relics of holy persons. (4 Kings 13: 21 also Acts 19: 11 and 12.) In a spiritual sense, the Cross is the symbol of our redemption, and as such it is given the place of honor, and venerated for what it means to us. The Apostles and early Christian writers constantly speak of "the power of the Cross." The Emperor Constantine, son of the Saint who found the True Cross, saw the vision of the Cross over the bat-

tlefield surmounted by the words "In hoc Signo vinces—By this Sign thou shalt conquer," and replaced the old Roman standards with the Cross. This holy Sign is marked upon us in Baptism, it is wafted over us in blessing, it is marked upon everything which is dedicated to the service of God by Holy Church. Once the brand of shame, it has become the sign of blessing and salvation. Even many non-Catholic churches, which once repudiated this symbol, now make use of it on their temples.

(3) As the Flag symbolizes the glory of our free country, so the Cross is the symbol of our Holy Religion. We may well be proud of it, as St. Paul was, and as Catholics through the ages have been. Our Blessed Lord bids us "take up our Cross and follow Him." The Cross is the sign of suffering, so we must expect to suffer for our Faith. Not only in outright persecution, but in calumny and misrepresentation on the part of ignorant and bigoted men. More than this, we are called upon to suffer for our Faith insofar as its tenets forbid certain things which we might have or do if we were not Catholics. "Bearing our Cross" is not an easy task. Yet we must not only bear it, but glory in doing so.

PERORATION. It was once (and still is, in some countries) a mark of apostasy to tread on the Cross. None of us is likely to be called upon by our enemies to deny our Religion in that way. Yet it sometimes happens that Catholics appear to be ashamed of their Religion. Half-way Catholics "soft-pedal" certain Catholic teachings, refrain from the performance of certain Catholic duties, for social or business reasons. Or, worse than all else, bring their Religion into disrepute by their careless, scandalous lives. Nothing hurts the Catholic Church more than a bad Catholic. Yet many a man who would "die for his religion" does not live by it. On this great Feast of the Cross, shall we not renew our allegiance to the King whose standard is the Cross; shall we not resolve to fight manfully under that banner sin, the world, and the devil. So, when Christ comes to judgment, and the Sign of the Cross appears in the heavens, we shall hail it as the Sign of our Salvation, and receive the Crown which Christ promises to those who have borne His Cross.

THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST

June 24

TEXT. *St. Luke 1: 66: What an one, think ye, shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him.* (*St. Luke 1: 57–68.*)

We keep today the feast of a Saint whose "Life" is entirely contained in Holy Scripture. Although written in the early chapters of the New Testament, it is the life of an Old Testament Prophet, the last of the Prophets, the first of the Saints. The Gospel for the Feast tells of the birth of St. John Baptist, for to him belongs this unique distinction that we observe the day of his birth, rather than that of his death, as his great Feast Day. St. Luke records also the interesting events which preceded his birth; the annunciation to Zachary, the Priest, his incredulity and the affliction of dumbness which punished him for his lack of faith. The verses which follow the Gospel for

today form one of the great canticles of the Church, said or sung each day in the morning Office, and at funerals—Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel. We are told, also by St. Luke, of the strange boyhood of the saint, how he "was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel." (St. Luke 1:80.) The same Evangelist, in the third chapter of his gospel, recounts the preaching of St. John, grown to manhood, and the Baptism of our Blessed Lord by him in the River Jordan. He also mentions his imprisonment by the Tetrarch Herod, and with the accounts of the other writers of the canonical Gospels, we are able to piece together the story of his martyrdom.

(1) Great as was his sanctity, high as was his office as the minister of a rite of the Jewish religion to our Blessed Lord Himself, it is as a witness to the great truth of the sanctity and indissolubility of Marriage that we will think of St. John Baptist, even on this his Birthday. True, he was the Precursor of the Messias, and of him Christ testified that "there hath not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John Baptist;" (St. Matthew 11:11) yet it would seem that his

special interest for us today, and the particular lesson he has to teach us, has to do not so much with his life as with his death. He was imprisoned by the Tetrarch because he publicly denounced and reproved that wicked monarch for his irregular marriage with his brother's wife. For it seems evident to scholars that Philip was still living, and that the marriage which St. John denounced (and for which denunciation he paid the price of his head) was exactly the sort of thing with which we today are so familiar.

(2) It was not, of course, the Christian and Catholic Sacrament of Matrimony, which the king had violated, but both the Natural and the Levitical Law forbade such a union, even supposing that divorce was permissible, which it was not. We are justified, however, in regarding St. John Baptist as the champion of marriage, (defensor vinculi) and we can understand something of the malicious rage which prompted Herodias to make her infamous daughter demand the death of the prophet who had proclaimed her shame. It is significant of the widespread indifference to the true doctrine of marriage in our day that this aspect of the work of St. John Baptist is so sel-

dom mentioned. One cannot but wonder what scathing denunciations might burst from the lips of this Saint could he return and behold our modern civilization, honeycombed as it is with the very evil against which he inveighed even at the cost of imprisonment and death. Well might he reiterate the words with which he greeted the crowds of old on Jordan's banks, "Ye offspring of vipers, who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance." (St. Luke 3:7 and 8.)

(3) If St. John Baptist was forced, by his very vocation as a Prophet of God, to bear his testimony against the loose and immoral ideas regarding marriage which prevailed in high places among his own people, how much more must the ministers of the New Law, the guardians of morality, the teachers of righteousness under the new and sacramental dispensation of the Catholic Church, lift their voices against the terrible abuses of our day. If they were silent, who would dare to reproach the men and women of modern times for their terribly laxity and downright rebellion against the moral law? If the Catholic Church did not continue to defend the Christian home, whence

could we expect to find help against its increasing overthrow before this unspeakable evil of divorce? For the non-Catholic churches do not dare take a stand; it is, indeed, the individualism of Protestantism (to say nothing of the "example" of the "Reformers") which has brought about this sad and dangerous state of affairs. The Catholic Church may seem very strict, but she has to be, especially as every other form of Christian denomination is so lax. There is a principle at stake, the divinely revealed and unchanging principle of the indissolubility of true marriage, and that cannot be set aside even for the comfort and solace of those who really deserve sympathy, still less can it be abrogated for the whim and pleasure of those who look upon marriage merely as a convenience.

PERORATION. Who would have thought that this child of prophesy, this hermit of the desert, this preacher of repentance, this Baptizer of the Lord Christ, would go down to history as the defender of a state of life from which he himself was shut out by vow? Should it seem strange, then, that the Priests of the Catholic Church, obligated as they are to celibacy, should be today, and always, the most

outstanding defenders of Matrimony and of the Christian home? Indeed, if modern civilization had no other debt to the Catholic Church (and it has many, and none of them can ever be paid) it would owe perhaps its greatest thanks to her for her dauntless stand on the sanctity of marriage. The Catholic Priest can perform no more patriotic duty to his country (whatever that land may be) than by bearing witness to the truth which St. John Baptist proclaimed, and insisting, with regard to all irregular unions whether sanctioned by the civil law or not," it is not lawful for thee to have her." (St. Matthew 14: 4.) And the Catholic laity, instructed and loyal, will stand to a man with their Priests and their Church in this transcendently important matter.

June 29

TEXT. *St. Matthew 16: 19: I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.* (*St. Matthew 16: 13–19.*)

First in the lists of the Apostles of Christ, given in the Gospels, stands the name of Peter, the Fisherman of Galilee, first called of the followers of our Lord, to whom He gave the primacy in the Apostolic College, the assurance that his Faith should not fail, the keys of the Kingdom, upon whom, as upon the rock which his name signified, He would and did build His Church. The Gospels tell us much of him, giving us a picture of his character, impetuous, weak before Pentecost, unflinching yet humble thereafter. We are told of his threefold denial of his Lord during the Passion; of his bitter tears of repentance; of his reinstatement by Christ upon his threefold

avowal of love for the Master; how he presided at the First Council of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15) and we have read his two Catholic and Canonical Epistles. He established the seat of the Papacy (the Holy See) first at Antioch and then at Rome, where he suffered martyrdom, being crucified, it is said, head downwards because he felt unworthy to be crucified as His Lord had been. His relics are at Rome, in the Vatican Basilica, the largest church building in the world.

St. Paul's name is always joined, in the liturgical offices of the Church, with that of St. Peter, and this feast day commemorates their martyrdom on the same day though in different parts of the city of Rome. The relics of St. Paul are enshrined in the beautiful basilica outside the walls of Rome. Tomorrow, also, is dedicated to the Commemoration of St. Paul, and both of these Saints have other feast days during the year, the Conversion of St. Paul being observed in January, and the Feast of St. Peter's Chains in August, while the "Chair at Antioch" and the "Chair at Rome" remind us of the foundation of the Holy See.

(1) Until the Sixteenth Century the preeminence and Primacy of St. Peter, and of

his successors in the Holy See, was never questioned even by heretics, while Catholics the world over looked to Rome as the center of unity and the Pope as the divinely protected Guardian of the Faith. The earliest Christian writers take these truths for granted, and each of the great ancient Councils of the Church was called by the Pope, and presided over by him or by his deputy. The Great Schism, by which the so-called Greek Catholic Church separated from Catholic Unity did not destroy the Primacy of Rome, though it questioned the universal jurisdiction of the Pope. The Protestant Reformation, denying, as it did, the very existence in the world of the Church which Christ founded (and promised should continue till the end of time) directed its fiercest diatribes against the Papacy, and today the only doctrine which Protestants hold in common is that (whatever else may be true or false) the Pope is wrong! The Lutherans and the Anglicans are especially bitter on those points which concern the "Petrine Claims" and it is easy to see why this is so, because nothing is more clearly taught by Holy Scripture than the Primacy, not only of honor but of jurisdiction, of St. Peter and his successors in the

Papacy. These two bodies, the one claiming to be the "true reformed religion," the other (part of them at least) representing themselves to be a "branch" of the Catholic Church which has liberated itself from the domination of Rome, must, if their claims are to be admitted, square them with the Bible, which both profess to hold as the sole Rule of Faith.

(2) The Gospel read in the Mass today sets forth the reasons for the claims of the Papacy. It would seem to be quite simple and clear. Jesus Christ selects one of His Apostles and gives to him the leadership of the Church which He founded. He declares that this Apostle shall be the foundation, the Rock, upon which He will build that Church; that that Church shall never fail, never perish, never go astray; that that Apostle shall have such supreme authority in that Church that the only possible simile is the bestowal of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And for twenty centuries the Catholic Church has taught and believed that Jesus Christ meant exactly what He said on that memorable occasion. Non-Catholic commentators have juggled with these texts, seeking to read meanings into them which were entirely unsuspected

for fifteen hundred years; saying that the "rock" upon which the Church was founded was not Peter but the faith which he professed, a faith, be it said in passing, that has been all but abandoned by the majority of non-Catholic Christians; distorting history in the effort to make it appear that the Catholic Church has "added to the Faith" in defining that Infallibility which she has always believed to be inherent in the Vicar of Christ.

(3) But the old Church has gone calmly on, "in spite of dungeon, fire and sword," in the face of renewed persecution, growing the more mighty even when schism threatened to rend her seamless robe. And today she stands before the world the sole defender of the ancient Faith, once for all delivered to the Saints. She has been able to hold that priceless treasure intact through the ages only because she possessed a living voice which could declare it with authority. She has lived through history, amid many vicissitudes. She has seen whole nations depart from her because she would not compromise the Faith. She has seen the end of those who left the security of her divine certitude; the schismatic Greeks divided into warring sects, subservient to the state which in col-

lapsing dragged them down; Protestantism moribund and disintegrating, having given up the very teachings, false though they were, which caused them to leave her. Today she faces a recrudescence of paganism more dangerous than any heresy, and hers is the only voice lifted to decry it. All this she has been able to do, building herself upon the Rock of Peter, because in her hands she holds the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, because her work is first of all spiritual, her chief concern with the souls of men, for whose sake she guards and enunciates the eternal truths by which alone they can be saved.

PERORATION. The test of the Catholicity of any nation has ever been its loyalty to the Holy See, its devotion to him who, as the Successor of St. Peter, and Vicar of Christ, rules and guides the Church. Our devotion to the Saint whose Feast we keep today, is best manifested in devotion to his successor, as our devotion to Christ Himself is tested and made practical in our loyalty to His Vicar. As our minds turn to Rome today, visioning the Tomb of the Apostle, rejoicing that he reigns with Christ in Heaven and joins his prayers with ours for the liberty and exaltation of Holy Mother the

Church, let us not fail to add a prayer for the Pope, our spiritual Father, our gladly acknowledged leader, our Sovereign Pontiff. Long live the Pope!

July 1

TEXT. St. John 19: 34: One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side, and immediately there came out Blood and Water. (*St. John 19: 30–35.*)

Our Holy Mother, the Catholic Church, wishes us never to forget the Cross and Passion of Jesus Christ, no, not for a single day. She places it before us on every altar of her churches, traces it over us in every blessing that we ask, and teaches us to bless ourselves with its holy sign. Not only are certain days of the year set apart for the contemplation of the Cross, but every Friday calls it to our remembrance by its injunction to abstain, to mortify ourselves a little, in honor of Christ's Death on that day. And every day the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered, the perpetual showing forth of the death of the Lord until

He come. (1 Corinthians 11:26.) It is the same Sacrifice; in both Jesus Christ offers up His Precious Blood to redeem mankind from sin.

(1) Recall for a moment what we know of the sacrifices of the Old Testament, in which countless animals, bulls, goats, lambs, were slain and burnt upon the altar of the Temple, their blood being sprinkled over the people. How strange such worship seems to us, yet such sacrifices are characteristic of all ancient religions, and were specifically ordered by God Himself in the case of the Jewish Church, which was, of course, the One True Church of God on earth until the coming of Christ and the foundation of the Catholic Church. St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, explains the meaning of these ancient and bloody sacrifices. They were "types and shadows" of the great Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, intended to foreshow that He should be the true Lamb of God, that His Precious Blood should be the true cleansing of the world from the stain and guilt of sin.

(2) For it is sin that makes sacrifice necessary, whether it be those old and figurative sacrifices, or the True Sacrifice of the Cross or its

continuance in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission," (Hebrews 9:22) and had not Christ shed His Precious Blood for us upon the Cross we could find no forgiveness. Unless that Precious Blood were applied to our souls in the Sacraments it would be of no avail to us. So we see that sacrifice and sacrament alike are because of sin; otherwise they would be unnecessary. It is, then, literally true, as St. John the Apostle of the Sacred Heart tells us, "the Blood of Jesus Christ—cleanseth us from all sin." (1 St. John 1:7.) Poured out, to the uttermost drop, upon the Cross, it is spiritually, but no less actually, applied to our souls in and by the Sacraments, to cleanse and forgive (as in Baptism and Penance) to be our lifegiving nourishment (as in the Holy Eucharist).

(3) When we say, "Blood is the price of Heaven" we are using no empty figure of speech. For it is literally true that Christ has purchased Heaven for us, and that the price He paid for our Redemption was His very life-blood. Not alone upon the Cross was that precious tide released from His sacred veins. The knife of Circumcision first drew its ruby

drops in atonement for our sins of impurity; many a time, as our dear Lord went up and down the length and breadth of the Holy Land, must His weary feet have been bathed in blood; in Gethsemane it empurpled His sweat of agony; in the Praetorium it welled from His scourge-torn back, and from His thorn-crowned Head; all along the Way of Sorrows it bedewed the ground; while He hung upon the Cross it drained away, till, when He was dead, the last precious drop came from His broken Heart as Longinus pierced it with the lance. And all this to win back for us that Heaven which we have forfeited by our sins.

PERORATION. Yet Christ has not done all; there remains somewhat for us to do. We must, of course, bring ourselves sacramentally into that divine stream that it may avail to our individual cleansing and regeneration. But even this is not all. We are not called upon to shed our blood as martyrs for the Faith, but we are called upon to live for the Faith, and to strive to the utmost against those temptations, those sins, which would make void, for us, the Cross of Christ, and His Blood shed in vain. (1 Corinthians 1: 17.) Our Salvation cost Christ His life-blood. What has it cost us? How little

we have done to assure ourselves of participation in those manifold and great benefits which accrue to us through the shedding of the Precious Blood. How careless we are about falling into sin, when we ought to resist it with all our power, plus the strength of the grace of God. "You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin," cries St. Paul. (Hebrews 12: 4.)

Our practical lesson, then, on this Feast Day, must be not only to take to ourselves the graces purchased for us by the Blood of Christ, but also to do our part in making that salvation our own. And no small part of this will be our struggle against temptation. "Rather to die than commit one mortal sin." Does that mean anything to us when we say it? Are we willing to mortify ourselves in order to overcome our evil inclinations? Will we put ourselves to inconvenience in order to practice our Religion? For it is thus that we may, in a figurative but very real way, shed our blood for the Faith, and so become champions of the Precious Blood of our Divine Redeemer.

THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

July 2

TEXT. *St. Luke 1: 43: Whence is this to me, that the mother of my lord should come to me?* (*St. Luke 1: 39–47.*)

Each day, in the Office, at Vespers, the Church repeats the Canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Magnificat, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour." (St. Luke 1: 46, 47 ff.) It is the daily Memorial of the Incarnation, reminding us (as does this Feast Day) of the great central and basic truth of our Religion, that God became Man for us, and was born of the Blessed Virgin. It is because of Her part in this surpassing Mystery that we honor Mary, Mother of God.

Imagine, for a moment, that meeting of Mary and Elizabeth. Both are to become mothers, both in a miraculous manner; Eliza-

beth, past the age of child-bearing, is to bring into the world the last of the Prophets, the Precursor of the Messias, St. John Baptist. But a greater miracle is seen in Mary, for she, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, is to be, nay already is, the Mother of Christ, and Christ is God, True God no less than True Man, hence the unique title of Mary, Theotokos, Mother of God. But this is, as yet, a secret, shared only by St. Joseph to whom it has been revealed by God Himself. A further revelation is vouchsafed on the occasion of the visitation, and Elizabeth becomes aware of the new dignity and the wonderful grace conferred upon her young cousin, and worshipping the Son that is to be born of Her, honors Her also as Mother of her Lord.

(1) It cannot be too often reiterated that the honor of Mary is the honor of Her son. Because upon the proper understanding of the relationship between Mary and her Divine Son depends the whole Faith of Catholics. Those outside the Church misunderstand the honor we pay to Mary, nor can they be expected to do otherwise, since, to a very large extent, they fail to approximate the faith we hold regarding the Divinity of Christ. Were Christ, as

so many of them hold, but a man, however holy, however great, however god-like, the honor that we pay to His Mother would, indeed, be extravagant and unwarranted. But because He is God, no veneration, short of divine worship, that we can render to Her who brought Him into this world to be our Lord and Saviour, can ever be too much. If non-Catholics are ever to reach a sympathetic understanding of the Catholic attitude towards the Blessed Virgin, they must first grasp the teaching of the Church regarding the Person of Jesus Christ. Once they understand that, they will no longer cavil at our regard for Mary, but will join with us in giving Her far more honor than most of them now give to Her Son. But then, once they really come to belief that Christ is God with all that that faith implies, once they learn to honor His Mother with Her full due of veneration, they will not, very likely, remain non-Catholics very long!

(2) Is it not strange that those who profess a singular devotion to the Bible, should have overlooked the passages therein which tell us of the Blessed Virgin? They are not many, but

they are, all of them, remarkable. That which forms the Gospel for this Feast, alone would justify Catholic honor to Mary, and it certainly casts a very strange light upon the lack of such honor on the part of these who profess to be guided by the Scriptures. For here we have the inspired account of veneration paid to Mary by one who was no mean Saint herself, and that before Mary had performed to the full Her great work of ministering to the Incarnation of the Son of God by bringing Him into the world. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." (St. Luke 1: 42.) Well has the Church added these words to those, of like import, spoken by the Angel Gabriel. It is the double witness of Her preëminent sanctity, to which Mary Herself adds the prophetic declaration "behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." (Ibid. 48.) This is, so to speak, the status accorded to Mary by the Bible itself. Yet, on the plea of combating what they are pleased to call "Maryolatry," these "Bibliolaters" have robbed Her of Her title "Blessed," nay have, some of them, refused to believe in an even ordinary virtue for Her,

branding Her a sinner and Her Son the result of sin, yet daring still to call themselves Christians!

(3) To be sure, in justice it must be said, they entirely misconstrue the teaching of the Church about Mary, if, indeed, they know what it is at all. Perhaps the best way in which we can meet their objections is to admit at once that Mary, no less than any other human being, needed a Saviour, and in Her own words gave honor to Him. For it was by the pre-applied merits of Christ, Who should be born of Her to be the Saviour of all men, without exception, that Mary received the unique grace of Her Immaculate Conception. Usually the difference between the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation must be carefully explained to non-Catholics who use the terms loosely and interchangeably. Another misapprehension on their part, which, in view of the movement in our time in favor of a dogmatic definition of the title, should be quite clearly understood, is regarding the part played by Mary in the work of Redemption and in the distribution of Divine Grace. The title, Mediatrix of All Graces, is very easily misunderstood, especially by non-Catholics, and among

them by those least prejudiced against devotion to Mary. They quote the Scripture text "For there is—one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." (1 St. Timothy 2: 5.) Quite true. Our Divine Redeemer is the only Mediator *by redemption,* but Mary and the Saints are mediators *by intercession,* as are also, indeed, the Priests of the Church who stand between God and men to bring God to them and them to God.

PERORATION. It is easily seen that all that is necessary to remove prejudice is a complete and reasonable understanding of the true teaching regarding these matters. This Catholics are often in a position to give and they are bound to have themselves a sufficiently clear knowledge of the truths of their Religion to be able and "ready always to satisfy every one that asketh (you) a reason of the hope that is in you." (1 St. Peter 3: 15.) A very practical way to observe this Feast Day would be for every one of us to take the Catechism and refresh our memories regarding the teaching of the Church on the honor of Mary. We would thus pay Her honor, and be in a better position to spread that devotion which we seek to cultivate in ourselves.

ST. JAMES THE APOSTLE

July 25

TEXT. *St. Matthew 20:22: Jesus answering, said: Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink? They say to Him; We can.* (*St. Matthew 20:20–23.*)

James, the son of Zebedee and Salome, and brother of St. John the Evangelist, was called with him to the Apostolate by our Lord, while they were mending their nets, for they were fishermen of the Lake of Galilee. (St. Matthew 4:12) From the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 12:2) we know that he was the first of the Twelve to give his life for his Master, being "killed with the sword" by King Herod Agrippa, A. D. 43. Of his work during the ten years preceding we know little, save what tradition has handed down of his journey to Spain and short apostolate in that country, of which from time immemorial he has been honored as the Patron Saint. His body was trans-

lated to Spain, and his shrine at Compostella is one of the most famous places of pilgrimage in the Christian world. Our Lord gave to him and his brother, St. John, the title Boanerges, or Sons of Thunder, and reading the Gospel for this Feast it is easy to see why they merited such a singular title. For they were brave men, ambitious men, of a character hardly to be expected in rough fishermen. Surely our Lord, Who reads the hearts of men, saw in them something unusual when He honored them with the Call of the Apostolate. May it not have been this same "great boldness" which even He admired, a boldness which we are unaccustomed to associating with the gentle St. John, who yet was brave to stand by the Cross when all the others had fled, a boldness to do and dare for their Master as we see from their reply to His question, "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?"

(1) It was St. James, with St. Peter and St. John, that saw Him drink that Chalice to the bitter dregs in Gethsemane. They had witnessed His Transfiguration, now they saw His humiliation. Of this, of course, they could have known nothing, when, with their mother, they made their bold request for thrones on the right

and left of the King Whom they had left all to serve. Yet the Master evidently is not displeased with them for what might, to a less keen eye than His, seem a presumptuous putting forward of themselves, an ambition for glory and honor. He calmly asks them if they can suffer with Him, and promises them that they shall. But He does not promise the thrones they ask. Suffering, death, that is what He offers them, and that is what they accepted, and what they both, each in his own way, found to be the guerdon of following Him.

We read that when they were called by Christ to follow Him, they immediately left their work and obeyed. (St. Matthew 4: 22) There was always that fine impetuousness in the answer of the chosen ones to the call of Christ. Those who hesitated, apparently lost their vocation. (St. Matthew 8: 21, 22.) It was this same impetuous enthusiasm which held St. James, and the others, to the end. But Calvary taught them all a lesson and Pentecost transformed them. Yet in their apostolic labors they show the same zeal, exalted, consecrated, with which they left all and followed Him. True, like St. James and St. John, they all expected an earthly reward. "Behold we have left all

things, and have followed Thee: what therefore shall we have?" (St. Matthew 19: 27.) To this question of St. Peter, representing the Apostolic College and speaking for them as their head, Christ returned answer "Amen, I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the seat of His majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (St. Matthew 19: 28.) Was not this what the sons of Zebedee had asked, and what Christ had refused to promise them?

(2) The two sayings of our Blessed Lord are not contradictory, but complementary, and they open to us the lesson of this Feast. The follower of Christ is not to serve for hope of earthly gain of any sort. It was of the mistakenly expected earthly kingdom that the mother of these sons of Zebedee questioned the Lord. It was of His heavenly kingdom that he made answer. But first the zealous saints must be proved, tried as by fire, drink of the chalice of suffering, learn to despise the Cross that they might glory in it. (Hebrews 12: 2 and Galatians 6: 14.) The synthesis of the two apparently contradictory ideas is found in the promise of the glorified Lord, revealing Him-

self to one of these two spiritually ambitious brothers after long years, "To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me in My throne; as I also have overcome and am set down with My Father in His throne." (Apocalypse 3: 21.) It is the old, old lesson, so hard for men to learn, that before the crown must come the cross. "Undergo—Overcome." So runs the motto over the door of an ancient monastery. And it is only to those who are *willing* to drink His cup of humiliation and suffering, that the Lord promises the glory of reward.

For, as we have already said, the follower of the Crucified may not bargain with Him, either for labor or for reward thereof. Only the spontaneous following concerns us. Whither, it is for Him to say. What shall be at the end, that too is for Him to give freely, for we cannot merit even the grace of a good death. However good our lives may have been, however filled with labor for God, at the end we can but say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which we ought to do." (St. Luke 17: 10.) It was not long before the Apostles learned their lesson in this matter. Day by day it came more and more fully to them that the

kingdom of their Lord was not of this world. Did He not tell them, in so many words, that the time was coming when they should be harried and persecuted for His Name's sake, "yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth a service to God." (St. John 16: 20.) And they were ready, all of them, so far as mere humanity could be, to go with Him both into prison and to death. (St. Luke 22: 33.) True, they failed Him, they all forsook Him and fled, (St. Matthew 26: 56) even the three (of whom our Saint today was one) who had seen His glory on Mt. Tabor, and His agony in the Garden, even the two who had said "We can" drink of the Chalice that Thou shalt drink of.

(3) But that was before the Resurrection, before Pentecost, before He had breathed on them and given them the Holy Ghost, before they had received their great commission to go into all the world as witnesses of Him, and with that charge had been given the grace to carry it out. The blood red color of the vestments today witnesses how St. James made good his boast, giving his life for his Lord, drinking indeed the cup as he had said he would. But it is the triumph of grace that we

celebrate today, not the fulfillment of a vow which would otherwise have been rash even for a Son of Thunder. "My chalice indeed you shall drink" (St. Matthew 20: 23.) That was all that Christ would promise to St. James and his brother, till they had learned their lesson, and it is all that He will promise us until we have learned what it means to be indeed His followers. Once that is grasped, comes the strength from on high which enables even the most timid and shrinking to stand forth with great boldness and carry the Cross after their Lord with perseverance to the end.

PERORATION. St. James, then, stands before us today as an example not of vaunting ambition, but of willingness to suffer and so enter into glory. It is not so much that he insists upon reward, as that he declares his desire, by the grace of his Lord, to follow Him through whatever trials may be proposed as a gauge of his devotion. The first of the apostolic band to suffer martyrdom, he blazes, as it were, the royal road by which all true disciples of the Crucified must enter into their rest. The only words of his which have come down to us are those of our text, expressing his willingness to share the cup of suffering with Him Whose

call he followed with such zeal. With what fortitude he "met the tyrant's brandished steel" we can only imagine, but if his voice could speak to us today we may not doubt that it would echo the words of St. Paul, "by the grace of God, I am what I am." (1 Corinthians 15: 10.) What a lesson for us to learn—we who ask so much of, and do so little for, our Lord—we who yearn for rewards yet shrink from the suffering that alone can make us, not worthy, but ready for them. May St. James the Apostle pray for us that we too may say, with a confidence not our own but depending solely on God's grace and strength, "we can drink of Thy Cup, O Lord, nor do we ask for any other reward than to drink it with Thee in Thy Kingdom."

ST. ANNE, MOTHER OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

July 26

TEXT. St. Matthew 13: 44: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field." (*St. Matthew 13: 44–52.*)

The Feast of "the good St. Anne" coming this year on Sunday, gives us an unusual opportunity for venerating this great Saint, and profiting by her holy example. (For résumé of her life, see any approved life of the Saint, or Catholic Encyclopedia vol. I, p. 538.) Permit me to call your attention to one fact with regard to this Saint, i. e. that during her life she wrought no miracles, though after her death innumerable cures and other favors have been brought about by her intercession. She is typical of those saints whose lives apparently differ in nothing from those of others about them, except in the superior and heroic sanctity of their hidden intercourse with Heaven.

(1) Such Saints are a great encouragement to us, for very few of us are called to do great things for God, but all of us are certainly called to holiness, and holiness, as someone has said, consists not so much in doing extraordinary things, as in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well, and from a supernatural motive. We may think of St. Anne as going about her household work, devoted to her family, careful in the practice of religion, but outwardly not distinguished at all from other women, except by her quiet and unostentatious goodness. Yet to her was given the rare privilege of becoming the mother of Mary, who was to be the Mother of God. You have heard how this tremendous favor was granted as an answer to persevering and patient prayer. Is not that an encouragement to us to go on with our prayers, even if God seems to delay His answers?

(2) St. Anne was an Old Testament Saint —that is to say, she lived as a good Jewess, looking forward to the coming of Christ, and hoping, as every good mother did in that day, that she might be kin to the Messias when He should deign to appear. The Immaculate Conception was accomplished through her instru-

mentality. Not that the conception of Mary was miraculous in its physical aspects, but that the child which Anne conceived was specially protected from the taint of Original Sin and the curse, which God had placed on all men, broken in her holy person at the instant of her conception. So that it may be truly said that the old dispensation ended with St. Anne, and that she, in the observance of the law of God regarding pure and honorable marriage, contributed the human element needed by the design of God for the salvation and sanctification of the human race. For this we give her honor, and in this we see what a pure, holy estate marriage is. Does not this encourage you, good married people, to regard your state of life, with its privileges and duties, as a holy thing, never on any account to be lowered to base or selfish uses?

(3) It was not so much the life St. Anne lived which made her a Saint, as the motive, the intention, with which she did everything. There were no outstanding events in her life, except the wonderful granting of her prayer which enabled her to become a mother in her old age. But to be worthy of such a favor she must have been indeed a very holy woman. All

that she did, was done from the pure motive of the love of God, in accordance with the Will of God, and always for the greater glory of God. This is the only motive that can make Saints of us. And if we do truly and sincerely live our lives with such intentions, we shall be Saints, even though we work no miracles, and those round about us see in us nothing more than good consistent practicing Catholics. That is exactly what the Saints were, good consistent practicing Catholics, and because they were such, God put it in their power to do great things for Him. How can we expect to do great things for God, if we do not even try to do the small things of life for Him?

PERORATION. If St. Anne is the special patroness of married people, she is also in a very real sense, the saint of the commonplace, the saint of ordinary daily life, the Saint whom it behooves us all to invoke and venerate in our little daily trials and difficulties, that we may have the graces we need to carry us through. I put it this way, because we are apt to go to God and the Saints for help only in the great troubles and crises of life, and to attempt to get along as well as we can by ourselves in the ordinary troubles and temptations which come

to us every day. This is a great mistake, for we always need help, in little things as in great. Remember, holiness consists in carefulness about the little things, then the great things will, so to speak, take care of themselves. We have a hundred little temptations to fight, as against one great trial. Our lives are hidden, inconspicuous, but they may be veritable treasurehouses of the grace of God, assisting us at every moment and in every need. Pray to the good St. Anne that this may be true of each one of us.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

August 6

TEXT. St. Matthew 17: 5: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him. (*St. Matthew 17: 1–9.*)

As we listen to the description, given in the Holy Gospel for this Feast of the Transfiguration of our Blessed Lord, we are all but overcome by the glory and the grandeur of the scene which the three specially chosen Apostles were privileged to witness. It is as if, for a few brief moments, the Son of God drew back the veils which covered His Divinity, and permitted us to behold Him as He is, the King in His Beauty (Isaias 33: 17), the glory of the Lord revealed (Isaias 40: 5), the Sun of Justice shining in all His splendor (Malachias 4: 2). What wonder that one of the greatest artists of all time took this scene as the theme of his most wonderful picture (The Transfiguration, by Raphael, in the Vatican.) Aside

from such a representation we can hardly imagine it at all, and we know that however splendid the vision in our mind's eye may be as we seek to contemplate this great Mystery, the reality must have been infinitely more wonderful.

(1) Note three details of this event. When the time comes for our Lord to be glorified, He does not permit it to occur in the presence of the multitude, but goes apart, even from His Apostles, taking with Him as witnesses only the three who were nearest and dearest to Him, St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, St. James, who was to be the first of the Apostolic College to die for the Faith, and St. John, the Beloved Disciple of Love and Saint of the Sacred Heart. They are the same three whom He afterwards chose to witness His Agony in the Garden! How profoundly significant. They share His glory, and they share His pain, and as Apostles they carry out the word which God the Father speaks from the cloud of glory, "This is My Beloved Son—hear ye Him."

(2) Besides the Apostles, two Old Testament Saints also are witnesses of the Transfiguration, Moses the Lawgiver and Elias the greatest of the Prophets. Summoned from

their rest in Limbo, they are the first of all the ancient world to behold the glory of the Saviour. They speak with the Lord Whom they had foretold, to Whom they had borne testimony in the Old Testament, and they speak with Him of His Death, which He shall accomplish so soon in Jerusalem. (St. Luke 9:31) For the glory of this Mystery is but a foretaste of the glory that shall be His when He has passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death for us men and for our salvation.

(3) It was upon Mt. Tabor that this great Mystery was exemplified, and Tabor, as you doubtless know, is symbolic of Purity. As we think of the Apostles thus being granted such a glorious vision of the Son of God in majesty, His garments white as snow, and His Sacred Face shining like the sun, we are reminded of His Own words in the Sermon He preached on yet another mountaintop, "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God." (St. Matthew 5:8.) It is because sin has blinded the eyes of the human race that God must hide His glory from us. Before sin came, our First Parents in the Garden of Eden saw God; but when they sinned they dared no longer look

upon His Face, and ran and hid themselves when He came to them. It was because of sin that the God-Man must hide His glory all through His life upon earth, save only at the moment of this Mystery of the Transfiguration when He revealed it to His Saints.

PERORATION. What is the lesson for us today in our meditation on this Mystery; what practical help are we to derive from the consideration of these three details of the event we celebrate? First, Christ is a hidden Saviour. "Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Saviour." (Isaias 45: 15.) If we would see, spiritually, the glory of our Divine King, we must go apart from the crowd, and seek Him in the hiding-place of His love, with only the Saints for our companions. This is no mystical language, it simply means Visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Then, if we would see the glory of the Lord, we must obey His Law, and watch for His coming. Moses the Lawgiver tells us this, for the Ten Commandments are in his hand, and they bind us under pain of the loss of Heaven, which is the Beatific Vision of God in His eternal glory. Elias the Prophet teaches us this, to be ever prepared for the moment (which we know not) when

Christ shall come to us, to be our Judge at the instant of death. Finally, Tabor, the Mount of Transfiguration, teaches us of the surpassing excellence of the virtue of Purity, which is the golden key unlocking the door of the Presence-chamber of God. How can we ever expect to see God, to relish spiritual things, to enjoy Heaven, if all that we care to look upon in this world is lewdness, all that we relish now the gratification of carnal appetites, all that we enjoy the lusts that drag us down to Hell. Let that be our lesson on this Feast of the Transfiguration, and if we learn it well, we shall pray that the grace of God may change and transfigure our life and give us a foretaste of the glory which shall then be ours hereafter.

ST. LAURENCE, THE DEACON, MARTYR

August 10

TEXT. *St. John 12: 25: He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal.* (*St. John 12: 24–26.*)

Among the early Martyrs of the age of the great persecutions, St. Laurence stands out on account of the peculiarly horrible sufferings which he was called upon to endure for the Faith, but also for a quality which he indeed shares with many another Saint, yet which, in his case, is especially noted by the Church in her offices for his festival—a holy fortitude which expressed itself in humor. Gladness of heart is the characteristic of more of the Saints than are noted for their sadness, indeed there is something about sanctity which seems to brighten and freshen human life. For Catholicism is not a religion of gloom, but of joy. It was left to the false religions of the Middle

Ages to import to Christianity the puritanical somberness which made of happiness almost a sin. St. Laurence, Saint as he was, enjoyed a good joke, and in the Office for his feast, two of these are preserved as examples to us of holy joy. When commanded by the pagan Emperor to deliver over the "treasures of the Church" which were in his charge as Deacon, the Saint gathered a great number of poor people and presented them at the Emperor's palace, remarking that these were the treasures of the Church, and that the earthly treasures which his cupidity demanded had been carried by their hands into the eternal treasuries. Again, on the very gridiron of martyrdom itself (for the Saint was roasted to death over a slow fire) turning to the wicked tyrant he said, "I am done on this side, turn me over!"

(1) You smile at such humor, and you do well to smile. But think of the fortitude, the wonderful grace of God, which enabled a man in mortal agony to make light of his sufferings because they were endured for Christ. Think, too, of the profound truth which lay back of St. Laurence's witty remark about the "treasures of the Church." Only a soul imbued and carried away by the great truths of Religion

could possibly say such a thing as that! Indeed, some of the most profound truths are, even in Holy Scripture, set forth in the form of paradox, which is a species of humor. We have one such in the part of the Gospel for this day chosen for our Text, (see Text above.) which gives us, among other things, the secret of the martyrs. They were men so thoroughly enraptured with thoughts of the Life to come, that they quite literally did not care what happened to them in this.

(2) We may learn, then, a double lesson from the Saint whom we honor today; the lesson of joy, and the lesson of suffering cheerfully because of what suffering, used aright, leads us to. A Catholic ought to be the happiest person in the world. He has the true Faith. He has the constant help of Divine Grace. He has the assurance of eternal salvation if only he will correspond with that Grace. The only thing that should make him sad is sin, and its consequences. And even that thought has its bright side, for what can make a man happier than the knowledge that his sins are forgiven, and the eternal (to say nothing of a good part of the temporal) punishment due for them remitted? To be sure, there are troubles and sor-

rows aplenty. But what but religion can give us the strength to bear them patiently, yes cheerfully? The example of the Martyrs, indeed of the King of Martyrs Himself, all teach us patient and cheerful resignation, endurance, nay even to welcome suffering as a means of acquiring merit.

(3) We are even admonished by Holy Scripture to count it a joy to have temptations (St. James 1:2) because they may, and ought to lead, not to sin but to victory by God's help. Again we are told that even when death comes to our near and dear ones we must not sorrow as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Often we are bidden to rejoice in the Lord. (Philippians 4:4 et al.) No, there is nothing gloomy about the Catholic Religion, and there ought to be nothing gloomy about Catholics! Even in our sorrows we may find joy, if we but make right use of them, by offering them up as the Martyrs offered up their agony.

PERORATION. The example of such a Saint as he whose feast we keep today should show us that sanctity need not make us less human. For God makes use of our human nature for the making of saints, and human cleverness, or

aptitude, is transformed into a useful work for God by the operations of Grace. The young Roman Deacon did not lose his humor when he became a Saint and a Martyr, any more than St. Paul lost his splendid intellectual gifts, or St. Ignatius his powers of organization, or St. Anthony his natural eloquence, or St. Thomas Aquinas his skill as a philosopher, writer and poet. Of course, we must not confuse humor with frivolity, or patience with stolidity. But all this ought to help us to realize that the jolly school boy, with his ever-ready joke, may become a Saint, and still be full of delicious humor; and the long-suffering mother, whose patience under her many burdens and sorrows is an example to us all, may be nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven than the dour, gloomy misanthrope.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

August 15

TEXT. *St. Luke 10: 42: Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.* (*St. Luke 10: 38–42.*)

Though not as yet infallibly defined as a Dogma de Fide, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has always, from the beginning of the Christian Era, been held as part of the belief of Catholics, the writings of the Fathers, no less than the Liturgy and constant Tradition, teaching it as a fact that the body of the Mother of Christ was assumed into Heaven shortly after Her death, reunited to Her immaculate soul, to reign forevermore as Queen of Angels and Men. No traditional teaching of our Holy Religion has been more firmly or universally held than this; indeed it has never been questioned by Catholics, which, perhaps, is the reason why the Holy See has

never felt it necessary to issue a formal ex cathedra pronunciation of it. Many, however, are praying that eventually this honor may be added to the glorious crown of filial devotion which the Church, from age to age, fashions for the Mother of God, and that the universal belief of Catholics on this matter may be exalted to the degree of a Dogma of the Faith. Meanwhile this Feast is deservedly one of the most glorious of the whole ecclesiastical calendar, one which we keep with loving loyalty and high acclaim.

(1) Legend has invested the Assumption of our Lady with many incidents which the pious imagination of the centuries has lovingly elaborated. Upon one of these we may profitably fix our thoughts today. It is told that when the Apostles came to pray at the Tomb of the Blessed Virgin, shortly after Her burial, they found the holy body, from which the Incarnate God-Man had taken Flesh, gone from the sepulchre, and in the place where it had lain, tall white lilies raised their heads typifying Her immaculate purity. It was because of the surpassing holiness and purity of the Mother of God that Her flesh could not see corruption, because She was the crown and flower of the

human race that Her body was assumed into heaven as a first fruit of the Resurrection of Her Divine Son. Alone, among all those redeemed by the great salvation of Christ, was this honor bestowed upon Her who alone was found worthy, by the preapplied merits of Him Who was Her Saviour, to be freed from the Stain of Original Sin and preserved throughout life from even the least taint of actual sin.

(2) These unique privileges and prerogatives of Mary make it, even humanly speaking, impossible that in Her death God would treat Her as an ordinary mortal. The fact of Her Assumption was never questioned until men fell away from the Faith, and, in a mistaken effort to add to the honor of Christ, began to derogate from the honor which had ever been paid to His Mother. Today the non-Catholic world knows nothing of the glories of Mary, and it is a significant fact of religious history that wherever the honor of Mary has been neglected or impugned, instead of advancing the honor of Christ, it has rather detracted from it, and those who began by slighting and belittling Mary, have not hesitated to go on to the derogation of the honor of Jesus Himself.

Too many, today, who still profess to be Christians, hold no firm and certain belief in His true Divinity, but regard Him as a Man, surpassingly great and holy, but only a man for all that.

(3) But where the honor of Mary has been fostered, there remains a vivid belief in the Divine Nature of Her Son. In the Catholic Church the old Faith has never wavered, and He Who was the Son of Mary is proclaimed today, as He ever was, and ever will be, True God and True Man. There is no confusion between the Resurrection of Christ and the Assumption of Mary. Jesus Christ rose from the dead by His Own Divine and inherent power. Mary's body was assumed into Heaven and reunited to Her incorrupted soul by the power of Christ. As Her Immaculate Conception was a preapplied grace of the Redemption of Christ, so her Assumption is a foretaste of the resurrection which shall be the lot of all the Redeemed. If St. Paul could call our Lord in His Resurrection "the First Fruits of them that sleep" (1 Corinthians 15: 20) surely we may reverently think of Mary as the First Flower of the Resurrection.

PERORATION. As Easter Day is the earnest

of our own resurrection from the dead, the pledge of our glorious immortality, so the Assumption of our Lady is a promise of the glory and bliss that shall be the lot of all who devoutly reverence and honor Her, by the true devotion and reverence of a good life. It is of Faith that those who depart from this world in the state of grace shall rise in glory at the Last Day, their souls become reunited to their glorified bodies, to enjoy the Beautific Vision of God forever in Heaven. So this is *our* Feast Day in a peculiar sense, because it shows us what shall be, please God, our destiny. We place ourselves under the patronage of our Lady, Queen of Heaven, begging Her to obtain for us the grace to live a good life, and to die a holy death, that we may share Heaven with Her.

August 16

TEXT. *Psalm 11: 19: He hath distributed, he hath given to the poor; his justice remaineth forever.* (*From the Introit of the Feast.*) (*St. Matthew 1: 1–16.*)

All that has come down to us regarding this Saint is based on legend and tradition. The cautious authors of "The Book of Saints" remark, "of the holy man's life, nothing whatever has been revealed to us; and the legends recorded in the various apocryphal gospels are so distorted as to be quite unreliable. That he was the husband of St. Anne and father of Our Blessed Lady are reasons amply sufficient for the prominence he has obtained in the worship of the Catholic Church. In the Introit of the Mass for this feast, Holy Church gives us the inspired description, by the Psalmist, of such a saint as him whom we honor today. The char-

acteristics of such an holy one, which are held up to us for admiration and imitation, are the very ones which are easiest to follow, generosity and justice.

(1) You never heard of a stingy Saint! For the saints were always obeying literally our Lord's admonition to "sell all that thou hast and give to the poor." Read the life of almost any saint and you will invariably come across some such words as these—"He sold his patrimony, and distributed the proceeds to the poor." St. Paul tells us that even if we practice all sorts of austerities, yes, even suffer martyrdom, and lack charity, it profits us nothing. Very few of us, to be sure, are called upon to make ourselves poor in order to save our souls. That is what the good Religious do, when they take the Vow of Poverty, but only a few are called to the poverty of the Cloister. On the other hand, remember that our Lord said it is a very difficult thing for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. A rich man, that is, who keeps and hoards his riches, for on another occasion Christ told us that riches, the Mammon of Unrighteousness, may make friends for us in Heaven; well spent, generously shared with those who need them more

than we, they may be a help to our souls instead of a snare.

(2) There is one way we may imitate St. Joachim and give to the poor even though we may be poor ourselves. That is by sympathy and help of other sorts than money. We can all of us do that, and there are opportunities every day for us to do it. Then again, while it is to be hoped that we all give as much as our circumstances permit towards the support of the Church, there are but few of us who can make large gifts. Very well then, our duty remains to give the little that we can, cheerfully, regularly, and honestly. We sometimes excuse ourselves from this duty, though it is a Commandment of the Church, on the plea that we are poor. Yet somehow we find money for things we want, often for things we do not need and the possession of which does not make us any happier than we were before. God forgive us if we turn our face away from those who are less fortunate than we. The day will come when we shall need help, and how can we expect others to help us when we have been hard and cold and unfeeling towards others?

(3) St. Joachim was the highest type of Old Testament Saint, of whom, like St. Joseph, it

could be said that "he was a just man." Integrity of character, uprightness of life, solid goodness—these things are within the reach of all of us, with the help of the grace of God. We may never climb to great heights of sanctity, but we can, every one of us in his own circumstances, be good practical Catholics, and a good practical Catholic is something very much like a saint! It is something to live so that people trust us, have confidence in us, rely upon us. We may not be very wise or clever, and yet have good common sense, "sanctified common sense" as someone has called that most desirable characteristic of the man who tries to do his duty, by God, His Church, and his neighbor, as well as he knows how. And we do know how, for from childhood up we have been taught our duty, and there is no excuse of ignorance for us if we do not do it.

PERORATION. The Saints of God have a further function than the important one of giving us a good example. They help to make it possible for us to follow their example, by their prayers. Many people have special devotion to particular saints, and this is quite right and proper. Our Patron Saints, whose names we bear, may be expected to have a special inter-

est in us as we have in them. But it is a good practice to pray to all the saints as their feast days come around, invoking their help, and trying to find out more about them. Have a good volume of the Lives of the Saints in your room and each day read the story of the Saint whose feast is kept that day. At least have a calendar on your wall, which gives the names of the various Saints whose feasts are observed from day to day, and add a prayer to that Saint to your regular devotions night and morning. Remember, someday, you hope, you are to be their companion in Heaven. Shall they be strangers to you when you meet them there?

August 24

TEXT. *St. Luke 6: 13: And when day was come, He called unto Him His disciples; and He chose twelve of them (whom also He named apostles): (St. Luke 6: 12–19.)*

The title "Apostle" means one who is sent. Our Blessed Lord, as we know, chose twelve men, whom He commissioned to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, (St. Matthew 28: 19; St. Mark 16: 15) and to administer the Sacraments which He had instituted. Of these, St. Bartholomew is usually identified with Nathanael the "Israelite without guile," mentioned in St. John's Gospel. (St. John 1: 47.) Tradition tells us that after the Ascension he preached the Gospel in North-west India, and afterwards in Asia Minor, and that in the end he suffered martyrdom in Greater Armenia. Some say that he was crucified, others that he was flayed alive (as represented in the famous statue of the

Saint in the Duomo at Milan). His relics have, for the last thousand years, been enshrined in his church in Rome situated on the island in the Tiber which bears his name.

(1) It is significant that the title Apostle was, in every case, borne out in the lives of those to whom it was given. Immediately after the Day of Pentecost, when the Church began to grow in such a wonderful manner, persecution broke out against it. The Jews, to whom the Gospel was first offered, refused to accept it, and turned against those who proclaimed it to them. The first Christians became dispersed, but for a while the Apostles remained in Jerusalem. (Acts 8: 1.) But soon they also were obliged to leave the Holy City, partly by the persecution, but more because they must set about the task, committed to them by their Divine Master, of evangelizing the world. "You shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1: 8.) Note that the Gospel was to be offered to the Chosen People. Upon their refusal of it, Samaria was to have the same wonderful opportunity. Afterwards the Gentiles also were to be brought into the Church. And, as things fell

out, it was the Gentiles that accepted, while the Jews rejected, the proffered salvation of God. To the Jews it was fitting that the Gospel should be preached first, but when they would have none of it the Apostles with one consent turned to the Gentile world. (Acts 13: 46.) For the Church of Christ was to be the Catholic Church, not limited to one nation and race, but for all mankind, universal in its extent, supra-national, open to all believers, satisfying all needs.

(2) The Apostles were the first Missionaries. We have in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles the story of those earliest mission days, epitomized in the account of the journeyings and labors of St. Paul. But the adventures of the other Apostles must have been no less interesting, remarkable and thrilling, though we have only meager tradition as to their details. Of the missionaries of later times also we have tales of wonder. The Bishops of the Catholic Church, as successors of the Apostles, took up and carried on their labors. The world as then known was small. Civilization was centered about the Mediterranean Sea, the Roman Empire was the world for the people of those days, all that counted, outside of which

were strange and little known lands, inhabited by barbarians. But those barbarians had souls, for which Christ had died, and His commandment to His Church was to teach not one nation but all nations. So forth the Apostles fared on their great mission, with the blessing of God, till one by one the heathen tribes bowed to the yoke of Christ. It was a long process, the Church always accompanying the explorers of those early days. Nor is that task ended yet.

(3) Today, after nearly two thousand years of labor, the great majority of mankind are yet to be reached by the message of salvation. India, China, Africa, are still, for the most part, pagan lands. Our own country is not only largely non-Catholic, but it is very largely non-Christian. It has been estimated that two thirds of the people of the United States are not affiliated with any religious body. Many of these people, perhaps through no fault of their own, are not even nominally Christian. There are surprisingly vast numbers who belong to the old non-Christian religions of the Orient, like Mohammedanism. And the utterly godless and indifferent are legion. To all these the Catholic Church has a duty, it is the obligation

laid upon her by her Divine Founder, to preach the Gospel to all nations, and it binds as much today as it did when the Apostles scattered through the ancient world in obedience to it. While as for those pagan nations beyond the seas, the missionary enterprises of the Church have, as yet, but scratched the surface. Interesting and encouraging as it is to know that there are more Catholics in China than Christians of any other name, it is much more important to remember that there are as many pagan Chinese as there are Catholics in the whole world! India is unconverted, save for small groups, though from the time of St. Bartholomew and St. Thomas the Gospel has been preached to that ancient people. In the Middle Ages St. Francis Xavier had wonderful success there, but the constant persecution has always presented tremendous difficulties to the devoted missionaries who have given their lives to what, humanly speaking, seems a hopeless task.

PERORATION. "Humanly speaking" I said, the conversion of the world to the Catholic Faith seems a hopeless task. Yet we are bound to carry it on, even though we cannot expect all men everywhere to accept our message. Our

part and duty is to see to it that they have the opportunity of conversion, "if so be they at least will hear, and if so be they will forbear." (Ezechiel 2: 5.) The Church, through all the centuries, has never become discouraged over the smallness of the return for the great labors her missionaries have put forth. She sees rather the great opportunity of the white fields waiting harvest of souls for God. Always the Missionary Vocation has been the magnet drawing heroic souls from home and kindred to the far places of the world, to hardships, even to martyrdom. Our own day has seen a wonderful revival of missionary enthusiasm, nowhere more marked than in our own land. There has been a great outpouring of men and money, yet the work is only begun. Still, today, the Lord is chosing His Apostles and sending them forth. Shall we be deaf to His call, should it come to our modern ears, should one in our own home circle receive it, should it even come to us? Priests, Sisters, Brothers, Lay Missionaries for the hospitals and institutions! They go forth, a mighty and ever-increasing army. What are you doing to help in this great warfare, this tremendous search for souls, this following out of the Command of Jesus Christ?

THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

September 8

TEXT. St. Matthew 1: 1: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ— (*St. Matthew 1: 1–16.*)

In the New Testament two genealogies are given of the human descent of our Blessed Lord; that in the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew traces His lineage from Abraham to St. Joseph; that in the third chapter of St. Luke goes back to Adam. The tables are given for the male side of the house, of course, but as St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin were cousins it stands for her as well, and the people of the time would not have known what to make of a genealogy through the mother's line. These tables are of importance because they prove the Human Nature of our Divine Redeemer. It may seem strange to us that such proof was ever necessary, for in

our day it is the Divine Nature of Christ which so many reject and refuse to believe in, while stress is laid upon His human aspect almost exclusively by those outside the Catholic Church. But in the early ages there were heretics who denied that our Lord was True Man, while admitting His divinity. And even today there are those who would have us believe that we ourselves have no true and real human nature, but are phantoms of a sort of divine dream, incapable of suffering or of sin.

(1) Against such errors, ancient or modern, the Catholic Church has always maintained both the True Divinity and the equally True Humanity of Jesus Christ, and she has, moreover, buttressed this teaching by laying stress on the office and ministration of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the divine plan and work of the Incarnation. So, on this as on several other of the feasts of our Lady, this genealogy of Christ is read as the Gospel in the Mass, to impress us with the dogma of the Perfect Humanity of Christ, "Who was made to Him of the seed of David, according to the flesh." (Romans 1: 3.) St. John stresses this teaching in the opening verses of his Gospel, 'And the Word was made Flesh," (St. John

1:14) yet it is this same Evangelist, especially in the context, who sets forth in unequivocal terms the faith of the Church regarding the eternal divinity of Christ. The whole Gospel story furnishes evidence of the reality of the Human Nature of our Lord; we are told of His helpless Childhood, of the arduous labors of His public ministry, how He sat weary at the wellside, slept in the boat during the storm on the lake, wept at the grave of His friend, ate and drank with His disciples, and finally the detailed account of His sufferings and death leave no room for reasonable doubt that He was True Man.

(2) At the same time there can be no question of His Divinity. The miracle of the Incarnation is clearly set forth, as is the mystery of His Virgin Birth; the whole course of His earthly life is compassed by miracles which He Himself asserts are proofs of His claim that He is God. That He made that claim again and again, and was finally put to death as a blasphemer for solemnly affirming it, the Gospels tell us plainly. The surpassing miracle of the Resurrection, hedged about as it is by the surest possible evidence, is the irrefutable proof that He was, indeed, what He claimed

to be, and the Church, divinely guided, has never ceased to proclaim Him God of God, Light of Light, True God of True God, Begotten not made, of One Substance with the Father. Both the Humanity and the Divinity are stressed in Dogmatic Theology, neither at the expense of the other, for in the Hypostatic Union, the human and divine natures are perfectly blended in One Person, Jesus Christ.

(3) Now the Blessed Virgin Mary, as the Mother of Christ, has held a unique place in the minds and hearts of Catholics from the very beginning. To Her was given the highest vocation ever vouchsafed to any human being, that She should bring into this world its Redeemer. Being the Mother of "the Man Christ Jesus" (1 St. Timothy 2:5) She is, because He is God, the Mother of God, and this title was given Her by the loving but carefully theological definition of the Church at the Council of Ephesus. Not, of course, that She, a creature and finite, could be the author of His Divine Nature, but that because He is God, and She His Mother, it follows that no other title can adequately describe that unique relationship. But the title was not given Her so much to honor Her, as to safeguard the truth

of the Incarnation, to stress the fact, which at that time was called in question, that Jesus Christ is verily and indeed True God and True Man, two natures in one Person, the Second Person of the ever-adorable Trinity Incarnate and born of a woman into this world to be its Saviour and its King.

There is, as has already been said, comparatively little danger today of denial of the Humanity of Christ. But danger there is, for the vague and pantheistic speculations of at least one modern non-Catholic sect are seen, on a little study, to be reducible to a direct denial of all human nature, and so aimed at the Sacred Humanity of Christ. If there is no such thing as pain, no such thing as death, if these mortal bodies of ours are a dream and an illusion, then it follows, does it not, that God never took to Himself the body of our humanity, nor suffered nor died in it for our salvation. Such teaching is the very opposite of the general materialism of the age, but it is also the negation of the foundation dogma of the Christian Religion. Is it any wonder that such a pesudo-religion has in it no place for Mary?

PERORATION. It cannot be too often or too strongly insisted that the true honor of Mary

protects and defines the honor of Christ. Were He not God, one shrinks from even thinking of the plight in which His Mother would be left in the eyes of the world. Were He but a phantom, a mysterious emanation of Divinity, and not bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, how could He be our Saviour? But through all the ages the Church, with one unswerving accord, has hailed Mary as indeed the Mother of God, and so has insisted on the true balance of the apparently conflicting doctrines of the Divinity and the Humanity of Christ. That He had a human Mother, is guarantee that He is True Man. That He had no human father is guarantee that He is True God. As each recurring feast of the Blessed Virgin comes around in the sequence of the Ecclesiastical Year we are reminded of these things, given opportunity to understand them better, brought to believe them ever more firmly. But each time we salute Mary, with the words of Gabriel, Elizabeth, and Holy Church, we proclaim our belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God. Today we keep Her birthday, the greatest birthday among all the children of men, second only to that universal feast on which we commemorate Her miraculous Child-

bearing. Already the preparation for the coming of the Redeemer has wrought one miracle in Her behalf, and She is born without the taint of Original Sin, the child of predilection. At Her birth heaven and earth rejoiced, for here is She who shall, in the fullness of time, make possible the salvation of the world.

September 15

TEXT. *St. John 19:25: Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother—* (*St. John 19:25–27.*)

Of all the Mysteries of that crown of prayer and praise which we call the Rosary, it is the Five Sorrowful Mysteries (is it not?) that we contemplate most often. Of all the events in the life of our Blessed Lady it is Her Sorrows that mark Her most surely as *our* Mother. In Her joys She is unique as in Her glories, but in Her sorrows She draws near and is one of us, for we, who can never know Her joys and Her glories, do know what sorrow is. Though Her's surpass any of ours, yet, differ as they may in degree, they are like ours in kind, and we can understand them, and She can understand ours. Was it not for this that She was called upon to undergo them? Surely they have a more far-reaching significance than

their merely historical connotation. Had She been (what Reason alone might have supposed She would be) the glorious Queen, sheltered from all sadness as She was preserved from all sin; had She spent Her life in some remote realm, apart, separated from all that might possibly militate against Her fulfillment of the preëminent office that was Hers as Mother of God, She could hardly be our Mother. But because She was Mother of the Incarnate Word the sword must pierce Her heart. For Her Son was a Man of Sorrows, Her Son must suffer, Her Son would identify Himself with mankind even to the uttermost anguish of the Cross. And by His side She keeps Her sad vigil, step by step as He goes through the gantlet of human experience She is with Him, and because of this She can be and is the Refuge of the Afflicted, the Patroness of Sufferers, the Queen of Martyrs.

(1) One might think that because She was exempt from the entail of Original Sin, and also was preserved from all Actual Sin, She would be free from the pain which always follows sin. One can understand that Christ, because of the great work of Atonement which He came on earth to do, must suffer in order

to accomplish it. But why must Mary suffer with Him? Ah, here we have, in the very statement of a perplexing question, the answer to it. Christ suffers *for us*. Mary suffers *with Him*. For Mary is so utterly and completely the Handmaid of the Lord, so perfectly united to Him by grace as well as by nature, that should She prescind from the suffering which that union necessitates She would not only be less Christ's mother, in the fullest sense of the word, but She could not be our Mother at all. It was only from the Cross that Christ gave Her to us. Of course She was there! What if the disciples had all forsaken their Lord and fled, She was there at the end, as at the beginning. We cannot think of Bethlehem without Mary, no more can we think of Calvary without Mary. She is an integral and essential part of both great events, and who shall say in which She is more blessed?

(2) Into the theological intricacies of Mary's part in our Redemption we need not go at this time. Nor need we linger seeking to penetrate that mystery of suffering and pain which is most difficult to understand when we consider the lives of the Saints, who seem somehow to have been marked in a special way with

the sign of the Cross. We may gain some conception of the deeper meaning of pain, as suffered by the innocent and good, when we recall the words of St. Paul, "Whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth; and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Hebrews 12:6 quoting Proverbs 3:11) The mystery of suffering is, then, no longer a perplexity, when we realize that it is through the gate of pain that mankind enters the path of perfection which leads to closer union with God. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (St. Matthew 16:24) The Way of the Cross has ever been the Way to God. For was it not the way which Christ Himself trod to bring mankind back to God? What wonder, then, that Mary, the greatest of the Saints, should have suffered more than any other. That Her sufferings were vicarious make them all the more precious in the sight of God, and gives them all the more power to draw us to Her dear feet.

(3) We may think of the Sorrows of Mary as endured, among other reasons, for the sake of making Her our sympathetic Mother, to whom we may go in our affliction and find solace. Had She not suffered, how could She be

the Consolatrix of the Afflicted? The very fact that we find it so difficult to understand why *She* must suffer, encourages us to approach Her when we find it hard to understand why *we* must suffer. Of course, we know that every pain we endure patiently, offering it up to God in a spirit of penance, is for the good of our soul. Yet there come to most of us trials and sorrows which seem to have no reason, or to be unjust. That is because we do not really know the reason, and forget that God cannot be unjust to us. At Mary's feet we may learn that lesson, She can obtain for us the grace to be reconciled to our trials and afflictions. Standing, as She does, at the foot of the Cross, she meets there all who come, and presents them to Her Divine Son, helps them to kiss the Cross.

PERORATION. We hail Her, then, today as most blessed, not in spite of Her sorrows but because of them. The sword pierces Her pure heart for a purpose that has to do with us, no less than it has to do with God. Long years before it was said to Her, "thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed." (St. Luke 2: 35.) And the world has told its sorrows to Mary,

opened its grief to Her, and never was it known that any who sought Her solace went away uncomforted. What if our woes are as the sea, She is the Star of the Sea who will lead us through them to the haven of peace and rest. Do we think our pain greater than we can bear? If She soothe the broken heart it may yet find strength to face its day and endure to the end. Nor does She despise our little troubles and anxieties, for is She not our Mother, to whom all that concerns us is precious. Under her patronage we flee for protection. May we see Her in Heaven to thank Her for all that She has done, and will do, for us.

ST. MATTHEW THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

September 21

TEXT. *St. Matthew 9:9: And when Jesus passed on from thence, He saw a man sitting in the custom house, named Matthew; and He saith to him Follow Me. And he arose and followed Him.* (*St. Matthew 9:9–13.*)

The Saint whose Feast we keep today is sometimes called Levi in the New Testament. (St. Mark 1: 14.) Aside from this, and the account of his call given in the Gospel for the day, there is no other scriptural mention of him. His subsequent career is uncertain, and in part legendary. St. Irenaeus says that he preached the Gospel among the Jews, and Clement of Alexandria states that this mission lasted fifteen years. Other ancient writers make Persia, Syria, Greece, etc., the fields of St. Matthew's labors. But the most accredited opinion is to the effect that he was the Apostle of Ethiopia, and accounts of his martyrdom

in Africa are extant. His shrine is at Salerno in southern Italy, whither his relics were translated in the tenth century. He is usually represented in Art with the book of his Gospel before him, and an Angel by his side. But it is not as the Evangelist that we shall think of him today, but rather as a perfect exemplification of that instant response to the vocation of Christ which should be ours no less than it was his.

(1) Our Saint of today was evidently a man of education and ability, for he held a by no means easy position under the Roman government. It was a position, too, which entailed considerable misunderstanding and hostility on the part of his own people, yet one in which it was perfectly lawful for him to engage. In giving it up to follow Christ he gave up literally everything, and entered upon a state of life so different from that to which he had been accustomed that he must have made more sacrifices than, perhaps, any other of the Twelve. We may piously imagine him as the typical business man of his time, yet deeply religious, for how else could he have been willing to obey the call to the apostolate so spontaneously and eagerly? Evidently, in spite of his name Levi,

he was not directly of the priestly line. Nor was he, by education, fitted for the work of a Doctor of the Law. The business in which he was engaged was purely secular, yet Christ called him from it to become one of the first Bishops of the Catholic Church. That he carried his zeal for ordered business into his apostolate is plain from the careful way in which he set down the Gospel which bears his name.

The break with the past, the sundering of the ordinary ties of life, the leaving of father and mother, home, lands, yes, all at the call of Christ, is seen in the case of all of the Apostles. Evidently our Blessed Lord demanded a complete severance of all other ties, in order to bind these men closer to Himself, for He tells them quite frankly "every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be My disciple." (St. Luke 14: 33.) But if our Lord expected great sacrifices from them, He promised them great rewards. "Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My Name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting." (St. Matthew 19: 29.)

(2) To some comes that special Vocation

which calls them to make the supreme sacrifice, not of offering their death to the Lord, as did the Holy Martyrs, but of offering their life in the fullest and most complete surrender. The Vocation to the Priesthood, or to the Religious Life, in its very nature is exceptional and comparatively rare. Once it is assured that an individual has received such a Call, the response should be, must be, instant and followed with an holy alacrity and joyfulness which, while it does not make light of the necessary sacrifices entailed, yet accepts them, glories in them, makes of them the material (so to speak) out of which every moment of devoted life thereafter is composed.

Of course, such a vocation must be tried and tested. Nor is it for the one who thinks he has received such a Call to make the final decision. Theology teaches that Vocation to Holy Orders is given by the Bishop when he ordains a man. By a parity of reasoning, the analogous vocation to the Religious Life is ratified and confirmed by the acceptance of an applicant to a recognized Religious Order or Society. The final choice, then, rests not so much with the individual as with the Church, speaking through her lawful authorities. It were well if

our young people understood this fact more clearly, but they, on their part, having conceived the idea that a vocation has been given them, ought to make the interior surrender promptly and thoroughly, always under the proviso that they shall thereafter discern the Will of God in the judgment of their lawful superiors. Of them great sacrifices are required. They literally forsake home and family, both as regards the past, which they leave behind, and as to future possibilities which they surrender. To them great rewards will be given, yet it is not so much for the sake of reward that they take the step that separates them from the past and dedicates them for the future, as for the very sake of the vocation itself. "For if I preach the Gospel, it is no glory to me, for a necessity lieth upon me: for woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." (1 Corinthians 9: 16.) That is the attitude of one truly called to the Priesthood. And it may truly be said that the clearest mark of vocation, either to the Priesthood or to the Religious Life, is the sense of the individual called that no other life is possible.

(3) But such a call is not for all. We are not apostles, but all of us are disciples. To the

general run of men and women there comes no Vocation of special or official service, but to all alike comes the supreme call to salvation and to sanctity. If it be true that a man called to the Priesthood can hardly save his soul outside of Holy Orders, (or one with a real Religious vocation outside of the Cloister) it is also true that if your vocation is to be a good carpenter, or a good business man, a good husband and father, a good wife and mother, then that is the very best state of life for you, and in it you can more easily save your soul than in any other. What has been said of the renunciation necessary in the fulfilling of the highest vocations given to men, is true in its degree of every calling, and especially true in that common vocation which all have, to secure their soul's salvation. It is a true call to follow Christ. And it means that we must leave something, sacrifice something, abjure something. We must, of course, renounce sin. And that, as a matter of fact, we have already done. We make our vows in Baptism, and they bind us all our life. What if, in later years, the world beckons, temptation allures, Satan seeks to enlist us in his army by drawing us away from our allegiance to Christ? We have already taken our stand. If,

then, we fall into sin, it is definitely a forsaking of Christ, a real denial of Him, a negation of that spirit of renunciation which He requires absolutely of all who would follow Him and be His disciples.

When we are tempted it is not always a question of whether this or that is mortal sin, but it is always a question, "is this one of those pomps of Satan which I have renounced?" For it is not enough that we keep ourselves free from downright offences against the Law of God. There is the positive "following of Christ" which is, and should be, the chief business of our life. What interferes with that is sin, great or less. And of all, without exception, Christ requires a willingness to do without those things which might in any way lead us aside from that discipleship. Fortunately we know how the whole life may be consecrated and dedicated to God, whatever its avocations may be. By the good intention, by making, from the heart, some such act as the Morning Offering so familiar to most of us, we bring every part of our life into the service of God, sin alone excepted.

PERORATION. To St. Matthew came the special call to the apostolate, and he immediately

corresponded to it, and in it he persevered, by the grace of God, till his daily and hourly sacrifice was crowned by martyrdom. Yet we can see how, had that supreme Vocation not been given him, he might yet have become a saint, sitting still in the custom house, performing the daily routine of his business, yet by offering it all up, doing it all for the glory of God, making of it his road to heaven, his following of Christ. It is something to think of for those of us to whom no special Call has been given. We may yet be apostles in will if not in deed, we may still make sacrifices by intention even if not required to make them actually. And who shall doubt that by so doing the royal way of the following of Christ shall be his, with its renunciations, its dedication, and, at last its rewards?

DEDICATION OF ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

September 29

TEXT. *St. Matthew 18: 10: Their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.* (*St. Matthew 18: 1–10.*)

What a terrible creature an Angel is! We are accustomed to think of them only as beautiful ministering spirits, sent by God for the succour and defence of His children here on earth, bearing His messages to His favored ones, worshipping eternally around His heavenly throne. But it is well for us to remember another aspect of the Angels, of which St. Michael is the startling example. The very first reference to Angels in Holy Scripture is terrible, for we read that when God had expelled, in anger, our First Parents from the Garden of Eden He "placed before the paradise of pleasure Cherubims, and a flaming sword, turning every way, to keep the way of the tree

of life." (Genesis 3: 24.) It was the destroying Angel of the Lord that slew the first born of Egypt; it was an Angel that prevented the prophet Balaam from his perverse ways; it was Angels that put to flight the army of the Syrians besieging God's chosen people. (4 Kings 7: 6.) Angels it was who smote Heliodorus profaning the Temple. (2 Machabees 3: 25–26.) In the New Testament we read of the terrible Angel of the Resurrection, at sight of whom the guards were struck with terror and became as dead men (St. Matthew 28: 3–4); an Angel smote Herod blaspheming, that he was eaten of worms and died. (Acts 12: 23.) And of the Angels of the Apocalypse, sounding the destruction of a wicked world who can speak save the inspired writer!

(1) All this should teach us that the Angels are powerful, with a might second only to that of God. This Feast Day reminds us of the war in heaven, before the creation of the world, when St. Michael drove Lucifer the rebel out of the presence of God forever. But Lucifer (whom we call the Devil) is still an Angel, albeit an evil one, and we can form some estimate of the power of Angels when we think how he has made himself Prince of this World,

and what dreadful strength he has for the destruction of souls. Yet we know that the might of the good Angels is all but infinitely greater than his. St. Michael overcame him, and by the Grace of God the Saints have overcome him again and again, for he is, after all, but a creature, and though permitted to tempt mankind, he knows that his time is short and his punishment eternal. (Apocalypse 12: 12.)

(2) It is because of this that our attention has been directed to the great and terrible strength of the Angels. For they are on our side in the battle which we wage against sin and the Devil. Strong as he is, they are stronger. Tempt us as he will, they will assist us. St. Michael is still the champion of God, the flaming swords of the Cherubim are still turned against evil. If we are living, as we ought to be, in union with God, lives filled with Sanctifying Grace, we need not fear the Angels, for they are our friends. But if we are, by sin, the enemies of God, then the angelic host is against us, and only the Mercy of God can restrain them from executing His just vengeance upon us. The Angels, remember, are real, not mere lovely pictures in a children's book; not beautiful statues to adorn a

sanctuary, but living, inestimably strong forces of God's supernatural world, which are, we must believe, in constant touch with this natural world of ours, ready always to carry out God's commands, and able by their very nature to do so. Ought we not, then, fear the Angels, as so many of whom we read in Holy Scripture feared them.

(3) For God sends His angels in punishment as well as in blessing, to destroy the wicked as well as to assist the just. They are all about us, whether we advert to the fact or not. It is they who keep the records of our life, both ill and good; it is they who, at the Judgment shall herd the wicked into Hell no less than gather the good unto the right hand of the Judge. All our life long we have been told of the dear Guardian Angel, ever at our side, to guide, to protect, to suggest good thoughts, to fight off the evil angels who come to lure us away from the path of virtue. And we love that Holy Guardian Angel, rightly, but ought we not also to fear him, fear to display to his pure eyes the sins which he abhors, and the temptations which he will help us to overcome if we will but invoke him.

PERORATION. St. Michael, prince of the An-

gelic Armies, stands with his sword to defend us in the day of battle, the life-long day of our ceaseless battle against temptation. He is our protector against the Devil, for to him God has given power to drive into Hell those evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. How often have we not fallen into their snares, simply because we forgot or neglected to invoke that great and mighty Archangel to come to our aid. For we are bidden by Holy Church to enlist his power on our behalf. You never know until you try it what a wonderful protection in times of temptation you have in the little Prayer to St. Michael which is recited after Low Mass, and which we ought, all of us, to say whenever Satan assaults the citadel of our souls. Yes, the Angels are on our side when we fight for right, when we struggle for virtue. Pray God they may never be against you. Pray that at the last they may bear your soul to Heaven, not plunge it into Hell. For they will come with the Lord when He comes to Judgment. (St. Matthew 25: 31.) May they be then, as now, our friends and champions!

October 7

TEXT. *St. Luke 1:28: And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.* (*St. Luke 1:26–38.*)

No one can doubt that the life of the Blessed Virgin was a life of prayer. Was She not so engaged when the angel came in unto Her and said the first "Hail Mary"? We may reverently imagine Her, in the Holy House at Nazareth, teaching to Her Divine Child the ancient words of the Jewish prayers which, as True Man, He had to learn with human diligence at His Mother's knee, even as we learned ours. The very first miracle of the Blessed Christ was worked at Her intercession, for at Cana they came to Her when the wine failed and Her prayer to Her Son was then the mere statement of the fact of their need. (St. John 2:3.) Thus we see Her, at the beginning of

the Gospel story, praying. And at the end She is still praying, in the Cenacle, the Apostles, we are told, "persevering with one mind in prayer—with Mary the Mother of Jesus." (Acts 1:14.)

It is of Faith that She intercedes for us in Heaven, where She is now enthroned. It is the pious opinion of theologians that all Graces and good gifts of God come to us through Her. The highest honor and devotion that can be rendered to any creature, to invoke Her in every necessity, to claim Her indeed as our Mother, *in deed* as well as in name.

(1) Among the devotions which the piety of the ages has inspired for rendering Her that homage and procuring from Her that intercession, none is more beloved than that of the Most Holy Rosary. Made up, as it is, of the inspired words of Holy Scripture and the official prayer of the Church, the "Hail Mary" itself comes to us with more than human authority. The "Our Father" is the Lord's own prayer, the only one which He taught to His Apostles ipsissima verba, the perfect prayer of Him Who was at once both God and Man; God, to Whom all prayer is directed even when offered through the intercession of the

greatest of Saints; Man who prays and thus acknowledges his utter dependence as a creature upon his Creator. To these are added the "Glory be—" a doxological form of the words of Baptism, again given us by Christ Himself and enshrined in Holy Scripture.

The combination of these prayers, which we call the Rosary, was revealed to St. Dominic by the Blessed Virgin Herself, who thus chose to give to us for our use a kind or style of prayer as old as religion itself. What wonders were immediately wrought by the use of this prayer, the official statements of the Church, as contained in the lessons for the Second Nocturn of this Feast amply testify. That these wonders have by no means ceased, any Priest can tell you from his own knowledge of its efficacy.

(2) Pope after Pope has urged the use of the Rosary upon the Catholic world, enriching it with innumerable Indulgences. In our own day a month has been set aside as a time of special devotion in this form. The Feast we observe today has been kept since the time of Pope Clement the Eleventh. Not only is the recitation of the Rosary the most usual of the extra-liturgical services of the Church, but it

is also, thank God, the most common practice of the Faithful. Yet who would deny that there is need to stir up our people to greater devotion to the Rosary, since it can never be used enough? Objections are brought against it by those who understand it not. They say that constant repetition of prayers makes them mechanical. But they do not understand the language of love, which is always repetition, which cannot say the same sweet phrases often enough, but must go over them again and again, till they become not mechanical but habitual. Of course, only the most bigoted and ignorant would bring against this devotion the supposed prohibition of our Lord, as contained in the Gospel, against the use of "vain repetitions" in the custom of the heathen. (St. Matthew 6:7, King James version of the Bible. This is one of the instances where the "Reformers" deliberately mistranslated the sacred text in order to use it against Catholic practice. The Douay version renders it correctly "speak not much, as the heathens.")

(3) With such an array of testimony to the efficacy of this form of prayer, with such great authority urging us to its practice, with the voice of loving association bearing its witness

in our hearts to its place in the most sacred memories of our life, shall we not keep this Feast most appropriately by making resolutions to be more devoted to the Most Holy Rosary? It is the easiest prayer to say, and it may be said anywhere, at any time. Hardly anyone, outside of Religious Houses, recites the entire fifteen decades of the Rosary every day; yet how many could, if they would! The ordinary "chaplet" of five decades is part of the equipment of every practical Catholic. It ought, even, to be part of his or her ordinary dress, always carried in pocket or purse, since there is an Indulgence for even this possession of the Beads. But it should be carried to be used. How many odd minutes there are in every person's day, when a decade might be said, or a few "Hail Mary's" and no one but God and our Lady be the wiser! And what better mark of identification, in case of accident? The unknown and perhaps mangled body is carried into the hospital, and if investigation finds the Beads on that dying or lifeless frame no one will think of sending for the Jewish Rabbi!

PERORATION. Rosaries are sometimes made of diamonds, strung on golden chains. But the

old black Beads, shiny and worn with use, are more precious than such a Rosary unsaid. USE YOUR BEADS! That's what they are for. Who knows, but they will thus save you? As Mary lived a life of prayer in this world, and lives forever in Heaven for prayer, unending and availing, let us also "pray without ceasing," the prayer we learned at our earthly mother's knee, the prayer which our Heavenly Mother loves best to hear from our devoted lips. What blessings it will bring to us, what graces so sorely needed, what rewards at the last!

October 18

TEXT. *St. Luke 10:9: ". . . and say to them: The kingdom of God is come nigh to you."* (*St. Luke 10:1–9.*)

The shame and the ruin of the Jewish nation lay in the fact that they rejected Jesus Christ, the promised Messias, for whose coming their ancient prophets had endeavored to prepare them as the Chosen People of God, to whom, first of all the world, Salvation was offered. It is difficult for us to understand how they could have been so blind, so hard-hearted, as to have made such a mistake. The Old Testament is full of detailed prophesies of the character, life and death of the Christ who should come. The Temple worship was symbolic of Him who should be the Lamb of God. And our Lord Himself, when at last He came, substantiated His claim to be the Promised One by such mighty miracles and such sublime

teachings that it seems that nothing but willful blindness and proud stubbornness could prevent them from hailing Him as their King, and His Church as the true Kingdom of God upon earth. True, they did not all reject Him; true, on more than one occasion even the multitude was filled with enthusiasm and acclaimed Him. But the thought of a King whose Kingdom was not of this world, a King whose crown was of thorns, and whose throne was the Cross, this was too much for their pride, and they who should have been the first to accept Him as their Lord, put Him to death and to this day His Blood is on them and on their children to their shame and dismay instead of to their salvation and their joy.

(1) For three years Jesus Christ went about preaching the Kingdom of God, preparing the world for the establishment of the Catholic Church which is that Kingdom on earth, a spiritual Kingdom, in which Christ reigns, governing His people by His own chosen and accredited representatives and ambassadors; in which He dispenses His divine grace to all who faithfully fulfill the conditions He lays down for receiving it; in which and through which He offers eternal salvation to

all who will accept it. From the Day of Pentecost, through all the centuries since, that Church has functioned in the world, easily recognized by certain marks and characteristics, always making high claim to be what it is, the true and only true Church of God on earth. And yet, today as in our Lord's time, there are those (and they are not few) who reject both Him and His Kingdom. We sometimes ask ourselves why this is; why intelligent and apparently good people, many of whom really love our Lord and strive to serve Him, can be so blind as to reject the Catholic Church and continue to live in man-made churches, or in no church at all.

(2) There are a number of reasons for the state of things which we see as we look out, from within the secure walls of the City of God, upon the so-called Christian but non-Catholic world. Most of the people who are outside of the Catholic Church are really not to blame for their ignorance, for they have been born and brought up in non-Catholic homes, and even taught to hate the Church by those who wilfully misrepresent Catholicism. Many know nothing whatever about the Church, even in this land of ours where there is

scarcely a hamlet without a Catholic congregation. They simply are not interested. They may discount altogether the lies and calumnies which the avowed enemies of the Church spread abroad, and yet because of their indifference to all religion remain untouched by the message of the Church, which, indeed, they have never taken the trouble to hear. This indifferentism is a far more dangerous condition than the anti-Catholic activities of paid "patriots." Two thirds of the people of our land belong to no Church, Catholic or Protestant. Yet truly the Kingdom of God has come nigh to them. They have been too busy with their worldly affairs, too indifferent, or too prejudiced, to pay any heed to the presence among them of the Catholic Church with its message of salvation to their immortal souls.

(3) But what shall be said of those who have been born and brought up in Catholic homes, instructed in their youth in the teachings of our Holy Faith, and who in spite of all the Church has done for them, have fallen away, become as indifferent to religion as their less favored neighbors, or it may even be actively hostile to the Mother that bore them? They may think they have reasons for their

neglect of religion, but on examination these "reasons" prove to be only excuses. Not one of them has left the Catholic Church in order to save his soul! Human pride, attachment to sin, hope of worldly advantage, or the love of some creature who means more to them than God and their own souls:—are not these the excuses of such unfortunate people for their neglect of their religion or their apostasy from it? Yet, for all this, the Kingdom of God has come nigh them, salvation has been offered them. And like the perfidious Jews, they have rejected their Saviour, and the responsibility for their choice is upon their own heads, they can blame no one but themselves for the terrible and eternal consequences of their indifference, their hardness of heart, their rejection of God.

PERORATION. For God will not force any man to be saved. He who created us without our will, will not save us without our will. (St. Augustine.) To be sure, God sets plainly before us the eternal advantages of serving Him, and sets forth every endearing motive to win our love and our allegiance. But the choice is ours; we are free to accept the conditions of salvation, to live good Catholic lives, to be citi-

zens of the Kingdom of God in this world and the next; and we are equally free to say, like the rebel angels, "I will not serve." But mark this well, we must abide forever by the consequences of that choice, and no one of us can ever say that he did not have a chance to go to heaven. For the kingdom of God has come nigh to every one of us; we have heard its teachings, we have seen its power, yes, we have been enrolled as its citizens. If, then, in spite of all that God has done for us, we grow careless and tepid, neglect our religious duties, and finally fall away altogether from our Holy Mother the Catholic Church, let us not dare to make the excuse that we didn't know any better, for that would be a lie in the face of God. Oh pray that rather the Kingdom may be nigh us for salvation, that we may die as we have lived, good fervent Catholics, passing from this world to the eternal Kingdom of Christ in Heaven.

October 28

TEXT. St. John 15: 18: If the world hate you, know ye, that it hath hated Me before you. (*St. John 15: 17–25.*)

Of St. Simon very little is known. In the New Testament he is surnamed the Chananaean (of Cana in Galilee) and also Zelotes (the Zealot). He preached the Gospel, according to tradition, in Egypt and North Africa, and is generally believed to have passed thence into Mesapotamia and Persia, in which latter country he laid down his life for Christ.

St. Jude (Thaddaeus) is always designated in the Gospels "not Iscariot," and the usual English form of his name is an obvious effort to avoid confusing him with the traitor who bore the same. He was the brother of St. James the Less, and therefore related by blood to our Blessed Lord. He is the inspired writer of one of the Canonical Epistles. The tradition

is that he preached the Gospel, first in Mesapotamia, and afterwards, in company with his fellow-apostle St. Simon, in Persia. They are said to have gathered an immense harvest of souls. SS. Simon and Jude suffered martyrdom together in Persia, and their festivals are celebrated together on this day.

(1) The fact that all, save one, of the Apostles died the martyr's death has more than an historical significance. So many of the early Christians gave their lives for their Faith that, during the first few years at least, martyrdom must have been the rule rather than the exception. From the beginning, the preaching and the profession of the Catholic Religion aroused the wildest hostility on the part of Jew and Pagan alike. When you consider how thoroughly at variance with the popular religions of the time were the teachings of Christianity, this does not seem so strange. A cult which exalted virginity, amid the unbridled licentiousness of the age; which taught men to love their enemies, when the whole world was seething with hate; which offered divine worship to One who had but lately left this earth after a career which, to the minds of His contemporaries, must inevitably be con-

sidered a failure; such a religion could not but be everywhere spoken against. (Acts 28:22.) But even these idiosyncrasies might have been overlooked by Paganism (if not by the Jews) in their easy-going broad-mindedness, had not the Catholic Church set up the claim to be the one and only true Faith, and denounced all others as false and evil. It was not so much that the early Christians refused to sacrifice to the gods of Rome as that they spat upon them and called them devils, which aroused the ire of the persecutors. Then too, the secrecy which, perforce, surrounded both the teaching and practice of Catholicism but added to the hatred of its enemies. True, they were accustomed to mysteries in their cults, but they were, as we know, of a far different nature than those to which converts to the Church were slowly initiated. The aristocracy of the time looked down upon Christianity as a religion for slaves. In a word, the Faith cut a clear line of demarcation across the civilization of the time, it reproved, reprehended, forbade the vices of the age, therefore it was hated.

(2) The Apostles were forewarned that this would be so. In the midst of the quasi-

popularity of Christ, when all seemed to be going well, when the multitudes followed Him because they saw His miracles, (St. Matthew 4: 25; St. Mark 2: 15; St. John 2: 6.) He told them that the end would be apparent failure and certain death, not only for Himself but for them. They went forth on their apostolic mission expecting just what came about. And the Church honors them, on their feast days, with the color of blood and fire, bespeaking both the Spirit poured forth upon them, and the blood poured forth by them. But their martyrdom was but the beginning of the ages of persecution which have never ended, and can never end. After a time the Church came forth from its underground hiding places, tolerated by the State, to grow in power till kings took their crowns from her anointed hands. Yet even when the Church was at the very apex of its worldly prosperity, there never was a time but, in some far land, men laid down their lives for Christ and sealed their faith with their blood. Nor was the outward supremacy of the Church ever free from attack. The later Middle Age witnessed the great Revolt, and the fires of persecution were lighted once more in lands that owed all that they were to the

Church. So bitter was the hatred then engendered against the Catholic Church that it has persisted to our own day, four hundred years have not been enough to eradicate it, though those same centuries have seen the warring sects reconciled in a common indifference to the very doctrines which called them into being. But however they may have agreed among themselves, or disagreed, they are one in their hatred of the Catholic Church, a hatred which is none the less strong because masked by the superficial suavity of modern manners and specious tolerance.

(3) It is true today, perhaps as never before, that the world hates the Catholic Church. The reasons are plain, and they are the same reasons that actuated Nero, Henry, and every other persecutor. For the Church today witnesses against the world, and therefore the world hates her, just as it hated her Divine Founder for the same reason. What other voice is lifted today, with anything resembling authority, against the rampant vices of our time? What other religion inveighs against the growing paganism of today; maintains the sanctity of the marriage tie, and of the married life; extols purity, forbids license;

preaches a definite and uncompromising Faith as the only true and divinely revealed way of salvation? Were the Catholic Church today to admit that she is only one of hundreds of man-made denominations, we could expect as easy a toleration as is accorded to any and every strange and weird religious manifestation from Christian Science to the Holy Rollers. Were she to relax her dogmatism, surrender to modernism, she might number her converts by millions instead of by thousands. Were she to make easy the path of the transgressor, strike the flag of her strict morality, condone the secret excesses of modern life, what popularity might she not expect? But if she did any one of these things, effected any one of these compromises, she would no longer be the Catholic Church. Much as she longs for the friendship of men, that she may gather them into her arms and save them, she loves her Lord and His Truth more. Not for the keeping of an entire nation will she set aside one jot or tittle of the Divine Law committed to her; not to avert an all but world-wide schism will she change one iota of the Faith once for all delivered to her. So she stands, hated, calumniated, persecuted by the world,

yet true to her mission, true to her Lord, true to herself.

PERORATION. As was her Lord, so is the Church; as is the Church, so must her least member be. Individual Catholics are involved in all that has been said of the hatred of their King and of their Religion. While most of us will never feel anything like strong persecution for our beliefs, while most of us rejoice in citizenship in a country at least nominally tolerant of all religions, yet most of us, at one time or another, and in one way or another, will be called upon to feel the hatred of the world because of our Faith. There are little discriminations in our every-day dealings with non-Catholics, little slights incident to our social life, intellectual disdain, covert laughter, pompous pity, which we must endure as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. (2 St. Timothy 2:3.) "The disciple is not above the Master, nor the servant above his Lord." (St. Matthew 10:24.) Nay, we are admonished to count it joy to suffer with Christ, with His Church, with His Saints. (St. James 1:2; St. Matthew 5:11; St. Luke 6:22.) Yet how we shrink from such slights, how we seek to avoid them, even sometimes to the hiding of the light of our

faith under the bushel of worldliness. Shame on the Catholic that cannot stand a little ridicule for the sake of his religion! Alas for the Catholic who barters his most precious heritage for the passing popularity of the moment! Had we more of the spirit of Faith we would have also more of the spirit of martyrdom, and had we that we would, each and every one of us, set forward the kingdom of God day by day by our works no less than by our prayers.

THE FEAST OF CHRIST, THE KING

The Last Sunday in October

The new Feast of Christ, the King, was proclaimed by the Pope at the close of the Holy Year of Jubilee, and commanded to be observed in every Catholic church throughout the world. It may seem strange that Holy Church has selected this Gospel for such a glorious festival, bringing before us, as it does, the vision of our Savior, crowned with thorns, forsaken by His friends, standing before Pilate, about to be sentenced to death at the demand of His own people who refused to accept Him. Yet, to the eye of faith, never was Jesus Christ more majestic than at this moment, when by His own lips He proclaimed Himself King of all the world, yet of a Kingdom which is not of this world.

(1) According to human standards, Christ has a right to this title, for He was, according to the flesh, of the royal house of David, to whom God had promised that there should

never lack a man to sit upon the throne of Israel. In Jesus Christ this promise was fulfilled. But He was more than an earthly monarch, for He was True God as well as True Man, and as the Second Person of the Ever-adorable Trinity, He is indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In His Incarnation He seemed to lay aside all His royal prerogatives. As Man, His life was simple, obscure, humble. Only twice in His earthly life was His kingship recognized; by the Magi when they came bearing their princely gifts to "Him that was born King of the Jews," in the cradle of His Nativity; and now, when He faces death and claims His proud title in spite of apparent failure, rejection, ignominy. Pilate (whether in irony or fear, who knows?) recognized His claim, and wrote the title which topped the Cross, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

(2) Two thousand years of history have but consolidated this claim of Jesus Christ. His enemies sought to destroy Him, and they failed. By His glorious Resurrection from the dead, Jesus amply vindicated this claim, and every other that He had ever made, even the stupendous claim that He was God. And if

God, then King indeed, of Heaven and of earth, and all that in them is. As such He ascended into Heaven, to take the place which in a surpassing mystery He had never left, at the right hand of the majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3.) As such He ever liveth, as in Heaven so on earth. As such He shall come again in power and great glory to judge both the living and the dead at the last great day. Of that terrible day St. John has written the prophetic vision in his Apocalypse. (Apocalypse 19:11–16)

(3) As King, Jesus Christ has established His Kingdom on earth, though as He told Pilate, it is *not of this world.* Rather it is the Kingdom of Heaven in this world, a real Kingdom, organized, with its laws and government divinely sanctioned, its officials, its citizenry, its privileges. It is called the Holy Catholic Church, and by the mercy of God we are members of it. Think what that means. Jesus Christ is *our* King. He has chosen and called us, and incorporated us into His Kingdom. We share its privileges, we live under its laws and government, we are its citizens, obedient to its officials who are His representatives. Its continued existence in this world,

after twenty centuries of the bitterest and most persistent persecution which any organization ever underwent, is the greatest proof, humanly speaking, of the Kingship of Christ. For all it is a spiritual Kingdom, its place in this world is recognized and secure. Nothing has ever been able to shake it, and we have the promise of Christ Himself that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.

PERORATION. We have taken Christ for our King, acknowledging His sovereignty. We are enrolled not only as citizens but as soldiers of His Kingdom on earth, and we confidently believe ourselves to be destined to enjoy His everlasting Kingdom in Heaven. It is necessary, in this day and generation, to stress the fact that all this does not militate against our loyal citizenship in whatever nation of earth we may belong by virtue of birth or adoption. The Kingdom of Christ being spiritual, and in its earthly manifestations international and universal, lays patriotism to our earthly country upon us as a religious duty. We cannot be loyal to Christ and disloyal to the land in which His Divine Providence has placed us.

The privileges of being members of the Kingdom of Christ entail great responsibilities.

We must never forget that we are "citizens of no mean city," (Acts 21:39) but "fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God." (Ephesians 2:19.) We must act as such, we must strive to be worthy of so wondrous a monarch, obeying His commands, loyally supporting His government, rendering to Him the homage that is His by right of His Divine Kingship. So, when He shall come in His dread majesty, we may hail Him indeed as our Lord and our God, King forever and ever.

November 1

TEXT. *St. Matthew 5: 12: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven."* (*St. Matthew 5: 1–12.*)

On this great Feast of the Church Triumphant, we, who are still in our pilgrimage, still members of the Church militant here on earth, lift up our hearts and minds to contemplate the glory of the Saints in Heaven, to thank God for their good example, and to pray that we too may someday join them in the Beatific Vision of God, Who is the Rewarder of those who faithfully serve Him.

It is a day of vast encouragement, a festival of holy hope, one of those times when God gives us a special incentive to "carry on" in our warfare against evil. And it is a very personal festival, because we, in the words of the Apostle, are "called to be saints." Heaven, where they reign with Christ in glory, is our

destiny. God intends us to be their companions through all eternity. Our daily task is to fit and prepare ourselves, by the assistance of God's grace, to share that blessed state, "the inheritance of the Saints in light."

How can we, so weak, so surrounded by temptations, to which we so often yield; how can we, who are just ordinary men and women, ever hope to join the Saints in Heaven? We know that of ourselves we can do nothing, merit nothing. But, as St. Paul tells us, we "can do all things through Christ."

(1) The Saints were just ordinary people like ourselves, until the grace of God made them what they were. Look at the Apostles—St. Peter, the Prince of them, denied that he knew our Lord. In the hour of trial, they all left Him and fled. Yet, by the grace of God, those same weak, ignorant men, converted the world, and died the death of martyrs. Look at that great multitude, which no man can number, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins. They had no Sacraments which we have not; to them the same Gospel was preached which we have heard. To be sure, they were given heroic virtues, but only when they had used the ordinary graces which are at the disposal of every sin-

cere and earnest Catholic. It was God's grace that made them Saints, and that same grace is ours, if we will but correspond with it and use it. The more we use God's grace, the more abundantly He gives it.

(2) When we read the Lives of the Saints, we are struck with wonder at the great things they did for God; we think their lives so different from our own; we say to ourselves, "if I were a Religious, if I were a Priest, if I were a Missionary, I might become a Saint." But not all the Saints were such. Today the Church commemorates that innumerable army of holy persons, men and women and children, whose names are known to God alone, yet who are Saints in Heaven along with the great ones whose names are inscribed upon the altars of the Church, whose feasts are kept day by day throughout the year. Very likely only a few of their neighbors knew they were saints at all, but God knew. St. Benedict Joseph hid himself under the stairs unnoticed in his father's house: The Little Flower hid herself in a convent, where her own sister still lives to venerate her: St. Gerard was misunderstood and calumniated by his own superiors: and if we go back to the days of the Catacombs, thousands of

martyrs then were known only because they had died in the arena. But why seek to give a catalogue of Saints—it is just because there are so many of them as to make a catalogue impossible that the Church keeps this great feast in honor of them all.

(3) What a tremendous encouragement all this ought to be to us. There is no incentive so forceful as a good example, and in the Saints we have instances of men and women, in every walk of life, who made full use of their spiritual opportunities. How can anyone, considering the meaning of this day, be cold and indifferent, to say nothing of despairing? For we have not only the example of the Saints, to urge us to better living, but we have their active aid and assistance. The Saints of the Catholic Church are not for mere decoration, that we may adorn our churches and homes with their statues, and make our windows glow with their pictured likenesses. They are, in a very real sense, our friends and helpers. In the glory of Heaven they are not unmindful of us who are yet on earth. Being near to God they are able to help us, and help us greatly, by their prayers. We have but to invoke them, to know by practical experience, how powerful they

are, what graces they can and will obtain for us.

PERORATION. If we do our part, they will do theirs. We know that we are destined for Heaven, it is to be our eternal home *if* we but follow the example of the Saints, avail ourselves of the graces which are offered to us no less than they were to them. Shall we not, then, take renewed courage from this glorious Feast Day; make a fresh start on the road which leads upward and onward to the company of the Saints: avail ourselves, more fully than ever before, of their powerful assistance? May the Saints obtain for us this grace of hope and courage; that as we remember them today, they may not forget us; that as we venerate them, so we may share their company forever before the Throne of God in Heaven.

DEDICATION OF THE ARCHIBASILICA OF THE MOST HOLY SAVIOUR

November 9

TEXT. St. Luke 19: 9: This day is salvation come to this house. (*St. Luke 9: 1–10.*)

We, to whom splendid churches and vast Cathedrals are more or less a commonplace, find it hard to realize that for nearly three hundred years there were no Catholic churches, though the Catholic Church (with a capital C) had not only survived the ages of persecution but had grown and flourished in a manner nothing short of miraculous. Until the time of Constantine, the Church had been obliged to worship in private houses, cemeteries called Catacombs, under the open sky, always secretly and in dread, her altars the tombs of the martyrs, her worshippers as likely as not being dragged from those altars to become martyrs themselves. But with the conversion of the Emperor himself to Christianity and the

consequent recognition by the State of Catholicism as a licit religion, the Church came forth, (as someone has said) like a glorious butterfly from its chrysalis, and immediately set itself to the task of erecting churches worthy, so far as man's skill and devotion could make them, of the worship of the One True God. The pagan temples tottered and fell, within their ruined walls sprang up the new shrines of Jesus Christ. In gratitude for his conversion the Emperor built a great basilica in honor of the Most Holy Saviour, which was solemnly consecrated by Pope St. Sylvester, and it is the commemoration of this first public consecration of a church in the city of Rome which we observe today.

(1) From the dawn of sacred history men have felt that certain spots were sacred, have dedicated certain places to the special service of God. The first sacrifices were offered in the open fields. (Genesis 4: 3 and 4.) Noe, coming forth from the Ark built an altar on the top of Mt. Ararat. (Genesis 8: 20.) Abram consecrated an altar at Bethel (Genesis 12: 8) and, years afterwards was ready to offer his dear son Isaac upon another open-air altar had not an angel provided another victim for the holo-

caust. (Genesis 22: 9.) Jacob, having seen his vision of the Ladder reaching to Heaven, dedicated an altar in that place. (Genesis 28: 18.) Moses, leading the Chosen People out of the bondage of Egypt, received not only the Ten Commandments from God upon Mt. Sinai, but also the laws for the old Jewish worship, which was until the Coming of Christ, the true worship of the one true Church. (Exodus 25 ff.) The Tabernacle, carried through the desert and set up each Sabbath Day for the offering of the appointed sacrifices, served, in more permanent form after the Jews were established in Palestine, until the building of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. (3 Kings 6 ff.) This Temple was consecrated by ceremonies lasting eight full days, and there the sacrifices, commanded by God Himself, were continued until the Jews were carried away into captivity in Babylon, when it was destroyed. The first act of the Jews on returning to their own land was to rebuild the Temple (1 Esdras 3 ff.) but this was destroyed, two centuries before the Coming of Christ, by Antiochus Epiphanes, and again rebuilt by the Machabees and reconsecrated. (1 Machabees 4: 47 ff.) Twice thereafter was the Temple

desecrated and rebuilt, and the great Temple of Herod in which our Lord Himself worshipped and taught, was overthrown by the Romans in the year 70 A. D. never to be restored. For the Old Covenant had then passed away, the Old Law had been fulfilled, and henceforth the altars of the Bloodless Sacrifice of Holy Mass were to be the true shrines of worship, not for one people only, but for all mankind.

(2) As has already been said, during the first centuries of the Church persecution made it impossible for the Catholics to build churches. At the very beginning they met for worship in the Cenacle, afterwards they joined in the services of the Synagogue, but very soon they were cast out, and began to meet in private houses. (Acts 12: 12, ibid. 28: 30.) This continued during the time of the Apostles, in whose Epistles we sometimes find mention of "the Church which is in So-and-so's house." (Romans 16: 5; 1 Corinthians 16: 19.) The heroic story of the Catacombs is familiar to you, and one may still see those subterranean passages, with the niches where the martyrs were buried. Not only in Rome, but in other cities did the Church grow and prosper under

such adverse circumstances. With the beginning of Church building another problem presented itself; what to do with the old idol temples when the heathen who had frequented them were converted to Christianity. "Destroy the idols and consecrate the Temples" said Pope St. Gregory II to St. Boniface when he sent him to evangelize Germany. And today in Rome you may see the Church of All Saints, which was once the Pantheon of the heathen Gods, the oldest complete building on earth still in use, the only one of the ancient temples of Rome that is not in ruins.

Everywhere the devotion of men built churches to the honor and glory of God, under the patronage of the Saints, which, duly consecrated by the rites of Holy Church became the sacred places of Catholics, where they offer their worship, receive the Sacraments, listen to the word of God, gather together in one communion and fellowship from the time they are first brought to those sacred portals as infants for Baptism, till they are carried out through them to the grave. What wonder that with loving affection men have lavished on these temples of God the wealth of art and architecture which represents the highest endeavor

of mankind. Yet the lowliest chapel in the poorest hamlet is just as truly the House of God as the most magnificent Cathedral. For there God dwells, there He meets His people, there He bestows Himself upon them. Of every Catholic Church in the world, small or great, the words of the Patriarch are doubly true, "How terrible is this place! This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of Heaven." (Genesis 28: 17.)

(3) Before a church building may be used for the liturgical worship of the Church, before Mass can be said in it, it must be consecrated or blessed and so set apart and dedicated to its sacred use. The ceremony for the Consecration of a Church is, perhaps, the most solemn and beautiful of all the ancient rites. It was first used, as we have it now, by Pope St. Sylvester in the consecration of the Archibasilica of St. Saviour, as commemorated today. We do not, unfortunately, have many opportunities of witnessing such a function nowadays, for a church may not be consecrated until it is completely free from debt, and not even then unless it is of a certain permanent construction. The Bishop anoints the walls, and performs other sacred rites, consecrating

at the same time the High Altar. But even when a church is not to be consecrated it must be solemnly blessed before Mass may be said therein, and this ceremony is usually performed by a Bishop. Thus the building is set apart solely for sacred uses, hallowed for the worship and service of God, made indeed a sacred place, not a mere auditorium for the hearing of music or a sermon, not just a gathering place for like-minded people, but a true temple of God, a real shrine of souls.

PERORATION. Until very recent years the churches of our land were, by force of circumstances, only plain structures possessing the bare necessities of worship. But as the Catholic people have made their way, by industry and effort, to a place of comparative wealth, they have not rested content with doing what was absolutely necessary for the Church, but have gladly gone on to the building of ever greater and more splendid edifices as shrines of their Faith. It is right that they should do so, for a Catholic church is a witness before the world of the devotion of the Catholic people. It is an offering made of Almighty God, Who is the giver of all good gifts, to whom all that we are and have belongs as of right. In giving, ac-

cording to our means, towards the building of churches, we are but rendering to God what belongs to Him and is only loaned to us. Nothing is too good for the Church, because nothing is too good for God. So we lavish our best upon our churches, nor do we forget the needs of our less fortunate brethren in distant parts of our own country and in foreign lands where still the missionaries struggle to teach the Faith to the heathen. The liberality of our people, in this great building era of Catholicity, cannot be too highly commended, nor can they be too strongly urged to carry it on, till every little hamlet has its decent church as well as every city its magnificent temple, all dedicated to God, all offered to Him, all consecrated to His service.

November 30

TEXT. *St. Matthew 4: 19: Come ye after Me, and I will make you to be fishers of men.* (*St. Matthew 4: 18–22.*)

St. Andrew, the first of the Apostles to be called by our Blessed Lord, was a native of Bethsaida in Galilee, an elder brother of St. Peter. He was a fisherman, which lends a particular interest to the story of his vocation as narrated in the Gospel for his feast day. He was a disciple of St. John Baptist, from which we may deduce his deeply religious nature. Various incidents bring his name into the Gospels, but of his subsequent activities, and the sphere of his missionary labors, little is known with certainty. It is, however, generally agreed that he labored chiefly in Greece and the Balkan countries. The Russians, who have taken him as one of their patron saints, assert that in his travels he penetrated at least as far as Po-

land. Tradition has it that he was crucified, on a cross of the shape of a letter X, at Patras in Achaia during the reign of Nero. (A. D. 60.) His relics were enshrined at Constantinople, and afterwards portions of his body were brought to Rome and enshrined in St. Peter's. Other notable relics are at Amalfi near Naples. By some he is regarded as a special patron of boys and young men, on account of the incident related in the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, where he brought to Christ the lad who had the five barley loaves and two little fishes which furnished the material for the miracle of the feeding of the multitude. (St. John 6: 8 and 9.)

(1) The simile employed by our Blessed Lord in calling St. Andrew and his brother St. Peter had, of course, its direct application to them as fishermen, as also to those other Apostles who left the same trade in order to follow Christ. The same parable was used again when He said "The Kingdom of Heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kinds of fishes." (St. Matthew 13: 47.) Like all the similitudes of our Lord, it is quite obvious. For the art of the fisherman, whether it be practiced for pleasure or for

profit, is one which demands both skill and patience, and may entail arduous labor. The task of the Apostles was to go forth into all the world, personally and through their successors, and gather into the Church the souls of men, as the fish are garnered from the great deep in the carefully placed nets of the fishermen. Their ship was to be the Barque of Peter, the only Ark of Safety, the Catholic Church. How they were to launch out into the deep and let down their nets for a draught (St. Luke 5: 4) was told them in detail afterwards. With what untiring patience, what care, what skill, what prudence they were to attract the souls of men by the preaching of the Gospel became known to them during the long years, after Pentecost, when they became indeed "fishers of men."

(2) The simile holds good today. For the souls of men are like the denizens of the deep, unstable, darting hither and thither, hard to catch, slippery, escaping sometimes through the interstices of the net, avid of freedom, shy of holy things. We think of the leaders of the Church as Shepherds, but they are still fishermen as well. Their task is, and always will be, one demanding patience, hardship, quiet skill. It seems a far cry from the beach where the

nets are spread on their reels, to the X shaped cross of St. Andrew, so like the end of that reel on which he dried and mended his nets. Yet in the years between, what a harvest of souls he had allured, by the patient sweetness of his message, into the net of the kingdom of heaven. The Apostles hunted souls, snared them for their own good, with such avidity that we can think of no better term to apply to one who is imbued with missionary zeal than to say that he has an apostolic spirit. It is the patience, the skill, the high adventurousness of that spirit, exemplified in the lives of the Saints down through the ages, that has, humanly speaking, brought success to the Church. As "G. K. C." has cleverly said, the Catholic Church must succeed by hook or by crook—by the hook of the Fisherman or the crook of the Shepherd!

(3) The task of the ingathering of souls to the Church is by no means done, after twenty centuries. The souls of men are still like slippery fish seeking escape from safety, requiring the utmost effort of those commissioned to capture them. Still God's fishermen must launch out into the deep, often at incredible hardship, often to toil all night and take noth-

ing. (St. Luke 5: 5.) Have you ever thought of the courage of our missionaries, in pagan lands and at home? They are confronted by herculean tasks, and given but few means to accomplish them. In entering the mission field they must not only make great sacrifices at the start, but must go on enduring a living martyrdom to the end of their lives. Discouragement must be one of their most frequent temptations. Yet they go on, content with small returns, patient like the fishermen in their little boats on the sea, plying their heavenly trade. Without the grace of God they could not go on. But they have heard the call of Christ, "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to be fishers of men." And He Who has called them will strengthen and support them, crowning their labors with a success not to be measured in terms of our human reckoning.

PERORATION. We read, now and then, of this or that Missionary who has passed to his reward, of the number of converts he has brought into the Church, the buildings he has erected, the work he has done. We are glad if by our prayers and our alms we have been of some slight help to him. But does it ever occur to us that, in our own small measure, the same call

has come to us that came to him in a far greater and more particular way? For every Catholic should be an apostle, a fisher of men, a convert-maker. The vast rank and file of us are not Priests, not Missionaries in the technical sense of the word, yet every one of us has opportunities to let down the gospel net and bring at least one soul into the captivity of Christ which is true liberty. We must not be content to save our own souls merely. The example of the Apostles, of the missionary Saints, indeed of all the saints, should spur us on to do our small part in the evangelization of the world. If one consecrated man in China can bring five hundred souls to God, surely you and I can bring one, besides our own! We may not go out in our boat, casting our net professionally as fishermen, but surely we can once in a while, take the time and trouble to go angling in the brook that runs by our door! Instead of the "very great multitude of fishes" (St. Luke 5:6) we may bring in but one, and not a very big one at that. But it may take all our skill, all our patience, to land that one! But what satisfaction to take a direct and personal part in the great task of bringing souls to God, what joy to have even one convert to your credit.

"He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." (St. James 5: 20.) How? By prayer, by good example, by direct instruction, by any and all of the arts of the fisherman!

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

December 8

TEXT. *St. Luke 1:27: And the Virgin's name was Mary.* (*St. Luke 1:26–28.*)

"Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee." (Canticle 4:7.) So sang the inspired prophet of old, foretelling the unique prerogative of Mary, which we celebrate on this great feast day, that She, who was to be the Mother of God, should be free, from the very moment of Her conception, from every taint of sin. Always the Church has believed and taught this fact, that Mary was freed, by a special miracle of Divine Grace, from Original Sin. We are accustomed to observe this day as an holy day of obligation. But have we ever asked ourselves *why* it was necessary for Mary to be exempted from the entail of sin with which every other human being has entered this world?

(1) To understand this, as far as we can, we have to go back to the very dawn of history, the very first day of the existence of the human race on this earth, and consider Eve, the first woman, the mother of all living. She, as well as Adam, was created, as theologians express it, in Original Justice, perfect spiritually as well as physically, with free will and intelligence and other spiritual attributes which warranted the assertion that man was created to the image and likeness of God. There are not lacking theologians who teach that even then God planned the Incarnation. Looking upon man, the crown of His creation, He desired to be united to humanity, to take man's nature upon Himself, to raise man to union with God even here in this world. But man sinned. Placed in the Garden of Eden, there was but one restraint upon this first pair of humankind; of the fruit of one particular tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were forbidden to eat. And they disobeyed God, they flouted His one simple and reasonable commandment. Tempted by the subtlety of the Serpent, Satan, Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, and caused Adam also to eat. So the new-made race fell, and sin entered the

world, with all its dreadful consequences; toil, labour, pain, sickness and death. But worst of all, this disobedience of man, this taint of sin, passed on to countless generations yet to be, required a Saviour. So far as was humanly possible, man had frustrated the plan of God, made it impossible for Him to fulfill His purpose and come into this world as Incarnate, for how can we imagine that God would take to Himself a human nature fallen, depraved, sinful? Yet come He must, that in human nature He might take away sin, by paying the terrible penalty of it, suffering and dying upon the cross, that man might be once more united to God.

(2) Yet in all the world there was now no human nature which He could take, for that originally just and perfect humanity which He created, was desecrated by the Fall. So in Mary, God creates anew. The child of human parents, brought into the world in a purely natural manner, yet, by a stupendous miracle of grace, Mary was freed, from the very moment of Her conception, from the taint of Original Sin, by the pre-applied merits of Him who should be Her Saviour no less than ours. So Mary is "the Second Eve," brought

into this world in that same original justice which Eve had before the Fall, a perfect, sinless, human being from whom God might take human nature upon Himself, be born as Man, live and suffer and die, and rise again and be glorified. Reason and piety alike shrink from imagining any other way in which God could have taken human nature upon Him, save by this miracle which prepared for the "Minister of the Incarnation" a humanity like that which God created in the beginning. Yet, outside the Catholic Church, even the most devoted of Christians deny this unique prerogative of Mary, under the plea that it must lessen the glory of Her Divine Son.

(3) This lack of faith in the Immaculate Conception usually comes from a complete misunderstanding of what that Dogma of the Catholic Church really teaches. But rightly understood, this great honor which God Himself gave to Mary, and all the honor which the Faithful have ever heaped upon Her, so far from detracting from the glory of Christ, rather enhances it. For Mary's honor is God's honor; Mary's glory is her Son's glory. If we give Her the highest homage that can possibly be rendered to any human being, short only of

the divine worship which can be, and is, rendered to God alone, it is because God hath highly exalted Her, who was humble and meek. It was not to crown Her with peculiar dignity that God wrought this miracle of grace in Her behalf, though that dignity and honor follow as a logical consequence of what God did for and in Her. But it was that the Incarnate Son might fulfill the great purpose of our redemption by taking to Himself a perfect and untainted humanity. How strange that they, who even deny the fact of Original Sin, would rob Mary of the privilege of being exempted from it! Yet it is not so strange, after all, that they who have, in these days, gone so far as even to deny the Divinity of Christ, should refuse to recognize any special sanctity in His Mother.

PERORATION. But the Catholic Church has always understood that all the honor rendered to Mary was rendered, through Her, to Christ; that a right faith regarding Her implied and safeguarded a right faith regarding Her Divine Son. History has proved, again and again, that men cannot deny Mary Her rightful place in the divine plan of redemption, without sooner or later coming to deny the Redeemer

Himself. So if we keep this great Feast of Mary with joy and devotion, it is because we realize that our homage to Her is pleasing to Him Who prepared Her to be His Mother, Who reverenced Her on earth, Who gave Her to be indeed a Mother to all the Faithful, Who exalted Her and crowned Her to reign with Him in Heaven. May She pray for us ever, who salute Her on this great feast, who steadfastly proclaim Her glory, who enroll ourselves under Her patronage. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

CHRISTMAS

"It is meet and just, right and salutary, that we should give thanks unto Thee, Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Everlasting God: because by the Mystery of the Word made Flesh, a new ray of Thy glory has shone upon the eyes of our minds; that while we know our God visibly, we may by Him be drawn to the love of things invisible—" From the Preface for the Mass of the Nativity.

(1) We were taught in our Catechism that we were created to *know God.* But at the same time we learned many things about God that seemed almost to make it impossible to know Him. God is Omnipotent, how can our weakness know almightiness? God is Omniscient, all-knowing, how can our ignorance understand Him? God is Infinite, how can we, creatures, finite, limited in every way, know the ineffable God? When we try to comprehend the eternal truths of God's eternity, our poor heads ache with the immensity of our thoughts, yet we can go only so far and we find ourselves

unable to comprehend that which is beyond our capacity. The world, to say nothing of the universe, is so vast, and we so small, yet God holds all in the hollow of His Hand. How can our puny understandings grasp such knowledge?

For ages upon ages mankind wrestled with these problems, searching as far as mere human ability permitted into the deep things of religion, and yet was not satisfied. What man wanted, what man wants today, is an object of love, comprehensible in terms of our humanity. We fear the great Creator, and worship Him, the very thought of Him fills us with awe. Yet we are bidden to love Him. Well may we cry out with holy Job, and with the multitude of the ancients of the world, "Who will grant me that I might know and find Him, and come even to His throne?" (Job 23: 3) or with Isaias "O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, and wouldst come down." (Isaias 64: 1.)

(2) It is exactly this essential human need for an object of love and worship, known in terms of our human life and understanding, that God met and answered in the Incarnation. Before the Crib the believing world realizes that here, at last, is One Whom it can worship as God, and yet love with all its human

affection as true Man, bone of its bone, flesh of its flesh, fashioned like us yet more than we. Stupendous mystery as it is, yet it satisfies all the cravings of Reason as well as the desires of the heart. So St. John speaks of Christ, the Word made Flesh, as "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life." (I St. John 1:1.) So our Holy Mother the Church, in her most solemn rites on this great Feast Day, exults and gives glory to God that we are permitted to know Him visibly.

(3) But beyond the human appeal of the little Baby there in the Manger, more strong than "the cords of Adam" by which we are drawn to the Man Christ Jesus, the eye of faith discerns the splendour of God before which all must bow in adoration. "Blessed be Jesus Christ, True God and True Man" we say, as we kneel before the Blessed Sacrament. That faith is the cornerstone of our belief, without which the whole superstructure of Church, Sacraments, Christian charity, morality, yes, life itself, would be a meaningless and impossible confusion. It is because God became

Man that we have the hope of Salvation. It is because the Babe of Bethlehem is God that we worship Him, believing that all that He said is true, all that He commands us is right. Because God became Man, we can know Him and love Him. And, we say it with all reverence, it is because God became Man that He can know and love us in such a wonderful way.

PERORATION. We have heard the Christmas story again and again, and yet it is always fresh, always appealing, always satisfying, to old as well as young. Not only as an historical fact, but as a present reality, we believe that the coming of Jesus Christ into this world, His taking upon Himself of our humanity, is of the utmost vital importance to each one of us. In a sense He did it for each one of us as an individual, just as He comes to us individually in His Most Blessed Sacrament. Think —God became Man *for me!* He is *my* Lord, *my* God, *my* Savior. The whole world kneels at His Crib, yet I am alone with Him in all the crowd. Shall I not give Him my heart and my soul, my allegiance, my loyalty, my obedience, my love? He gives me Himself; shall I hold back anything He asks—yes, my all, myself?

Thus are we, each of us, drawn by Him to the love of things invisible. Thus is our whole purpose and motive in life changed and supernaturalized by the Love of the Babe of Bethlehem. Yet all this is intensely practical, it can and should make great changes in our life day by day. What is your Christmas present, your Birthday gift, to Jesus Christ on this happy morning?

ST. STEPHEN, PROTOMARTYR

December 26

TEXT. St. Matthew 23:37: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children—and thou wouldest not? (*St. Matthew 23: 34–39.*)

No sooner has the great feast of the Birth of our Divine Lord been kept by the Church than she bids us do honor to the first of that multitude who gave their lives in defence of the Faith which that Lord came upon earth to establish. St. Stephen was one of the Seven Deacons chosen and ordained by the Apostles themselves shortly after the Day of Pentecost. (See Acts 6: 5 and following.) Their duties were chiefly the charitable relief of the widows and orphans for which the Church, even at that early day, was so solicitous. Probably they also assisted at Mass, as the Deacon does

today. Of the seven, St. Stephen stood out preëminent for his "grace and fortitude" and also for the miracles which he worked. Arrested by the Jews he bore witness to the Faith, preaching a wonderful sermon which has been preserved for us in the seventh chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. For this he was stoned to death, and so the name Martyr, which originally meant "a witness," became the title of honor for those who give up their lives for the Faith.

(1) Persecution has been the lot of the Catholic Church, from the very dawn of her history up to the present day. Nor is there reason to suppose that it will ever be otherwise, since her Divine Founder prophesied, "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (St. John 15: 20.) St. Stephen was the First Martyr for the Faith of Christ, but he was not the last by countless thousands. The first three centuries of Catholicism were one long series of general persecutions. But the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church, and from that blood-stained field the choicest flowers of sanctity arose. As the Church spread through the world, devoted missionaries who carried the Faith to heathen

countries, baptized with their blood the infant Church which they established at such tremendous sacrifice. Not one nation was evangelized without its martyrs. Nor has persecution always been the work of pagans. When, in the sixteenth century, there came that great revolt against the Faith, wrongly called "the Reformation," the new man-made religions which sprang up engaged in wholesale persecution of Catholics, the rancor of which remains to this day a blot upon our civilization.

(2) Since then, to be sure, actual martyrdom has been rare, even in heathen lands. The last generation heard, with wonder and awe, of the martyrdom of Chinese missionaries. But our own times have seen only the lesser trials of covert hostility and open calumny directed against Catholics even in this free land of ours. We must not be too ready to ascribe the hostility so often directed against Catholics to the simple fact that their religion differs from that of their neighbors. Often racial and political antagonisms play a large part in the unfortunate strife of which nearly all of us have had some sort of personal experience. Yet, even making allowances for these things, it is certain that the spirit of persecution has not

died, though its hands are tied, and any one of us may be called upon any day to bear witness to the Faith at some personal cost and inconvenience.

(3) Unless we are ready and willing to do this, we do not really merit the name of Catholics. If the spirit of persecution still persists in the enemies of Holy Church, the spirit of martyrdom must still live in us, else we shall lapse into an evil peace and a false security which may well endanger our Faith. For the experience of the ages proves that the Faith flourishes best under pressure of hostility, that those who have to fight for their religion value it most and practice it best. Men love most that for which they pay: that which requires sacrifice on our part is most precious to us: so it is well for us if we make our own the words of David, "I will not offer to the Lord my God holocausts free cost." (2 Kings 24: 24.)

PERORATION. In the prayer of the Church for this Feast Day we ask for the grace to imitate that fortitude which we admire in St. Stephen; that charity as well, which caused him, after the example of our Lord Himself, to pray for his enemies. (See Oration in the Missal for Feast of St. Stephen.) The least we can do

for those who persecute the Church, and so persecute us as members of the Church, is to pray for them. Indeed our Lord lays that upon us as a primary duty, "pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." (St. Matthew 5: 44 and 46.) There is no other way to obtain the supernatural grace to obey that hardest of all commandments "Love your enemies." (Ibid. 44.)

December 27

TEXT. St. John 21:24: "This is that disciple who giveth testimony of these things, and hath written these things; and we know that his testimony is true." (St. John 21:19–24.)

The three festivals of Saints which follow Christmas illustrate three of the various ways in which our Divine Redeemer calls elect and heroic souls to give their lives for His sake. St. Stephen was the first martyr, in will and in fact, actually to give up his life "for the testimony of Jesus Christ." St. John the Evangelist, writer of the Fourth Gospel, though he would, doubtless, willingly have become a martyr, was the only one of the Twelve Apostles to die a natural death. In fact, he did once offer himself for martyrdom, before the Latin Gate, where he was plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil, but escaped by a miracle. Exiled, in his old age, to the barren island of Patmos,

he saw there the glorious visions which he recorded for us in the last book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse. He was a martyr in will, but not in actual fact. And the Holy Innocents, whose feast we keep tomorrow, were martyrs in fact, though not in will.

(1) Holy Scripture gives to St. John the beautiful title "The Disciple whom Jesus loved." His Gospel, written many years after the other three, breathes an atmosphere of divine love, and his three Epistles constantly reiterate the commandment "love one another." It might truly be said that the Fourth Gospel is the Gospel of the Sacred Heart, as St. John is Its Apostle. His whole emphasis is epitomized in the words "So God loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son." Critics have assailed the Fourth Gospel, in all manner of ways, to no effect. But the Catholic Church, of course, has always given it honor. Before the death of St. John the Gospel had been preached throughout the then known world, thousands had been converted, the organization of the Catholic Church was fully and firmly established. It was for well-instructed Catholics that St. John wrote his Gospel, to such he addressed his Epistles, and it was to

Bishops of the Catholic Church that he sent the messages of his Apocalypse.

(2) It is well to remind ourselves of these simple facts, because nowadays there is, in the non-Catholic world, a strange insistence on the Bible as a fundamental of Christianity, and at the same time an even more strange disregard of it and disbelief in it. Our Protestant friends, to a large extent, take it for granted that Christianity is the religion of a Book, that it is based on the Bible, that all its teachings are enshrined in the New Testament. They do not stop to think that before the New Testament, as we have it today, was completed by the Apocalypse of St. John, there had been time for nearly two generations of good practicing Catholics to be converted to the Faith, thoroughly instructed in it, yes, even to go to martyrdom for it, and not one in a thousand had ever even seen a copy of the Gospel. Indeed the New Testament was not completed until thousands had suffered martyrdom for the sake of the Eternal Truths of the Catholic Religion, which they had learned, not from a Book, but from the oral tradition of the Apostles and their successors. The Catholic Church *taught* the Gospel, before she wrote

a word of it. And the Catholic Church would go on teaching the Gospel till the end of the world, even if every Bible were destroyed.

(3) This fact is all the more impressive, because there are today a multitude of non-Catholic but professing Christian teachers who are busily at work destroying the very Bible upon which they profess to base their religion. We have read much, of late, even in the daily newspapers, of this controversy in non-Catholic churches, and the whole affair, stated in simple and unvarnished terms, amounts to this: that probably the majority of non-Catholics, especially their ministers, have ceased to believe in the Bible, have ceased to believe in miracles, have ceased to believe that the Gospels were written by the Saints whose names they bear, have ceased, therefore to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in any special and unique sense. Certainly their Christianity, their Protestantism, is a very different thing from that which their fathers professed. The very teachings which called them into existence have been abandoned, and the movement for a pan-Protestant unity is only possible because each denomination has practically given up its dis-

tinctive doctrines which cut it off from the other non-Catholic bodies.

PERORATION. So it comes about, in these days of ours, that the Catholic Church alone clings to the Bible, believes in it, teaches it. Nothing could be more certain disproof of the old calumny that the Catholic Church forbids the Bible to her people. Non-Catholics can no longer lay claim to the proud title of "Bible Christians." But the Catholic Church, which never professed to hold the Sacred Scriptures as the *sole* Rule of Faith, still defends the written Word of God, as she ever will defend it, against the attacks of those who, in the name of progress, would overthrow it altogether. In her solemn services she makes constant use of the words of Holy Writ. Her priests must spend about an hour every day in reading portions of the Bible. And to her people she offers spiritual privileges if they will read duly authorized translations of the Bible. May this feast of St. John, the Beloved writer of the Gospel which bears his name, teach us to treasure the written Word of God, which the Catholic Church interprets to us, and which comes to us upon her authority alone.

THE HOLY INNOCENTS

December 28

TEXT. *St. Matthew 2:18: A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not.* (*Quoted by the Evangelist from Jeremias 13:15.*) (*St. Matthew 2:13–18.*)

"Hail, Flowers of the Martyrs" sings the Church, in her hymn for this sad festival. To these infants, martyrs in deed though not in will, we give all honor. For by their deaths they bore witness to the Christ Child, making possible His escape from His first persecutor. While we abhor the cruelty of the wicked king who could decree such a holocaust for his own selfish ends, we cannot but rejoice in the glory to which these little ones were admitted, without having first to run the gamut of the world's sorrows and trials, and doubtless sins as well.

The lessons of such a feast as this throng upon us. Of them we can only choose three for our instruction and admonition.

(1) The first is the lesson of great reverence for little ones, even babies. For they are (what we can never be again, alas) sinless. Washed in the Baptismal Font (as the Holy Innocents were in their own blood) they have been freed from the taint of Original Sin, and not yet having committed any sin of their own they are indeed holy ones, sinless, wholly pleasing to Almighty God, and therefore they should be the object of the utmost reverence to us. Of such, Christ Himself said, "their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in Heaven." (St. Matthew 18: 10.) To which He added this admonition, "See that you despise not one of these little ones" (Ibid.). Knowing, as we do, the great blessings which Baptism brings to the human soul, how careful we should be to assure to the little ones the reception of this first Sacrament at the earliest possible moment. So necessary is Baptism that anyone can administer it, using water, the proper form of words, and having the intention to do as the Church does.

Can there be any excuse for keeping any baby from the benefits of Baptism? And what shall be the terrible responsibility of those who run the awful risks of delaying those benefits?

(2) But that infants may receive Baptism it is necessary for them first to be brought into this world. The act which, in married life, starts a new human life, is sacred and may not be tampered with under pain of mortal sin. Alas that it is necessary to speak such words, but it is necessary today, necessary even to remind our Catholic people of such fundamental principles of morality. For there has spread abroad in the world in recent years a great evil, which strikes at the very springs of life, and would make of the most sacred human act a mere selfish gratification of passion, forgetting its primary purpose, bringing sin into a relationship which should be the most wonderfully beautiful of all human functions. Besides this, Herod's slaughter of the Innocents is as nothing, the voice of Rachel mourning for her children (because they were not) is as a whisper compared to the cry of the little ones denied their right to life, a cry which, surely, goes up before God for vengeance.

Again, Christ's warning is reiterated, with a new and dreadful meaning, "See that you despise not one of these little ones."

(3) But what shall be said of those infants who have been brought into this world, only to be taken from it again, still in their Baptismal Innocence? Whatever may be our personal grief for them, it must be mitigated by the knowledge that they have received a great blessing from God in being thus early called away from a world which would, undoubtedly, have been a snare to them. Think of the troubles, the sorrows, the trials, the pain, and (last but not by any means least,) the sins they have been spared. When your hearts are sad for them, try to think of that; try to remember that they are *safe* forever. On this day we may reverently picture them as playing with the Holy Innocents in Heaven, gathering around the feet of Mary, their eternal Mother, accompanied by the Angels who have never had to weep for them, as our Angels have so often had to weep for us. Happy, indeed, are they, who have escaped the contamination of life. And all the more *ours* because taken from us almost as soon as they were given. Many a sad parent has had cause to wish that a recreant

child had died in infancy rather than grow up to fall into greivous sin, and, it may be, go on in it to a disgraceful end.

PERORATION. The Church keeps this Feast of the Holy Innocents but a few days after Christmas, not only on account of the historical event of the Massacre of the Infants so soon after the Birth of Christ, but as illustrating one of the three classes of martyrdom by which witness borne is to the Saviour: St. Stephen (whose feast is the morrow of Christmas) Martyr in will and in deed; St. John Evangelist, Martyr in will, but not in deed; the Holy Innocents, martyrs in deed, though not in will. Yet all gave their lives for Christ. Shall we do less? What though we may not be called upon to shed our blood for our Religion? We can at least be willing to do so. We can at least imitate the spirit of the martyrs. And in keeping God's Law we shall, all of us, be called upon to suffer for truth and righteousness sake.

THE END

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